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# PCGAMES

addict

IN-DEPTH REPORT

## HALF-LIFE 2

VALVE'S AMAZING NEW PLANS REVEALED...

EXCLUSIVE!

## STALKER

Glowing report on the game from Chernobyl

## MEGA Mini



MSI's brilliant barebones PC!

REVIEWED!

## Starship Troopers

Not just a bug hunt! Would you like to know more?

DISC MISSING?  
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CALL OF DUTY SEQUEL!  
EXCLUSIVE SHOTS AND FACTS INSIDE

## 15 IN-DEPTH REVIEWS

- V8 SUPERCARS 2 ■ SACRED
- GANGLAND ■ DESERT RATS
- PAINKILLER... AND MORE!

## 34 PAGES OF NEW GAMES

- BLACK & WHITE 2 ■ VAMPIRE
- STARSHIP TROOPERS
- EVIL GENIUS ■ PIRATES!

ISSUE 22  
JUNE 2004

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# PCGAMES addict

Issue 22 June 2004

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# WELCOME TO AUSTRALIA'S BEST PC GAMES MAGAZINE

## Crate Expectations\*

It's not so easy to get to see Valve these days. They seem to be a bit busy. Completing *Half-Life 2* has instilled a palpable sense of urgency. Pressure on a scale Noah would have understood, as the first drop of rain ran down his nose, with only Mr & Mrs Aardvark on board his boat. Still, the old posting-myself-in-a-crate routine never fails, and despite some unpleasanties with a crowbar in the mailroom, I made it past the Barney on the door.

Valve's HQ has changed a bit since I was last there. Pre-*Half-Life* it was like a scene from a bad FPS: all cardboard boxes and empty rooms. Post mega-game success, Valve's lair has evolved into an extension of the *Half-Life* universe and an expression of the fun they have designing their games. The metallic, Black Mesa interior decor is offset by an entrance lobby centrepiece in the shape of a giant turn-wheel valve. Twisting it must surely let in a torrent of water a la the early *Half-Life* sewer levels but I resisted the temptation. The game's been delayed enough. More outlandish still, life-size renditions of the original *Half-Life* weapons lay strewn on the floor. Just where a gamer would expect to find them. I was almost disappointed to discover

that the receptionist wasn't a Vortigon. But that little oversight was more than compensated by the game itself. Valve have lost none of their genius for pure game design. In fact there's so much to say that we're going to have to split our report into two parts.

*Half-Life 2* may yet prove to be less significant in the long term, though, than other developments at Valve. Their plans and the reality (so far) of Steam have split opinion at PCG and in the wider community (see page 32 for the full lowdown on what Steam is and does).

The cynical faction frets that this is the beginning of the end for the mod community in its current form. They worry about what will happen if more companies follow Valve's example, and set up umbilical connections with their fanbase. Surely the constant drip-feed of new content will place an enormous burden upon supply? In effect, corporate interests will turn on their giant hoovers and suck up the entire mod community's output. All that creativity will then be blown back down the broadband pipe, directly onto gamers PCs, except now we'll be charged for stuff we could previously pick off the net for free. This viewpoint is both Luddite and selfish.

The truth is that if a mod is good enough to be sold for money then it already is. Mods like *Day of Defeat* are already boxed and stuck on shop shelves. What's more, if a mod is good enough, then why shouldn't the team that's slaved over it be rewarded for their efforts? Talent should be rewarded, because that can only lead to bigger and better things. If a brilliant amateur can make a great mod then just imagine what they could do if they could afford to give up their day job. Giving the best of the mod community a new route into making games professionally is only going to lead to the right people making better games. And that means better games for all of us.



**MARK DONALD**  
EDITOR



\*Last month, there were several complaints that the picture of the Editor, and its tenuous link to the cover game, was not adequately explained in the text. Upon investigation, the PCGA Complaints Committee has upheld these charges. So this issue, I'm in a crate. Because there are crates in *Half-Life 2*. And I've just been on a trip to see it. Possibly in a crate. Do you see? DO YOU SEE? Oh, never mind...





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This month we give you the chance to check out our sterling cover title, *V8 Supercars 2*. Other demos include a multiplayer demo of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, *Perimeter*, *Soldner: Secret Wars*, *Warlords Battlecry III* and even more for those of you

totting a DVD version of the mag. To find out what else is there see page 95 for more details.

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**40** Bug out to the new FPS take on the smash-hit sci-fi movie. Would you like to know more? Dropships now boarding for page 40... Citizens get first choice of seat, naturally.



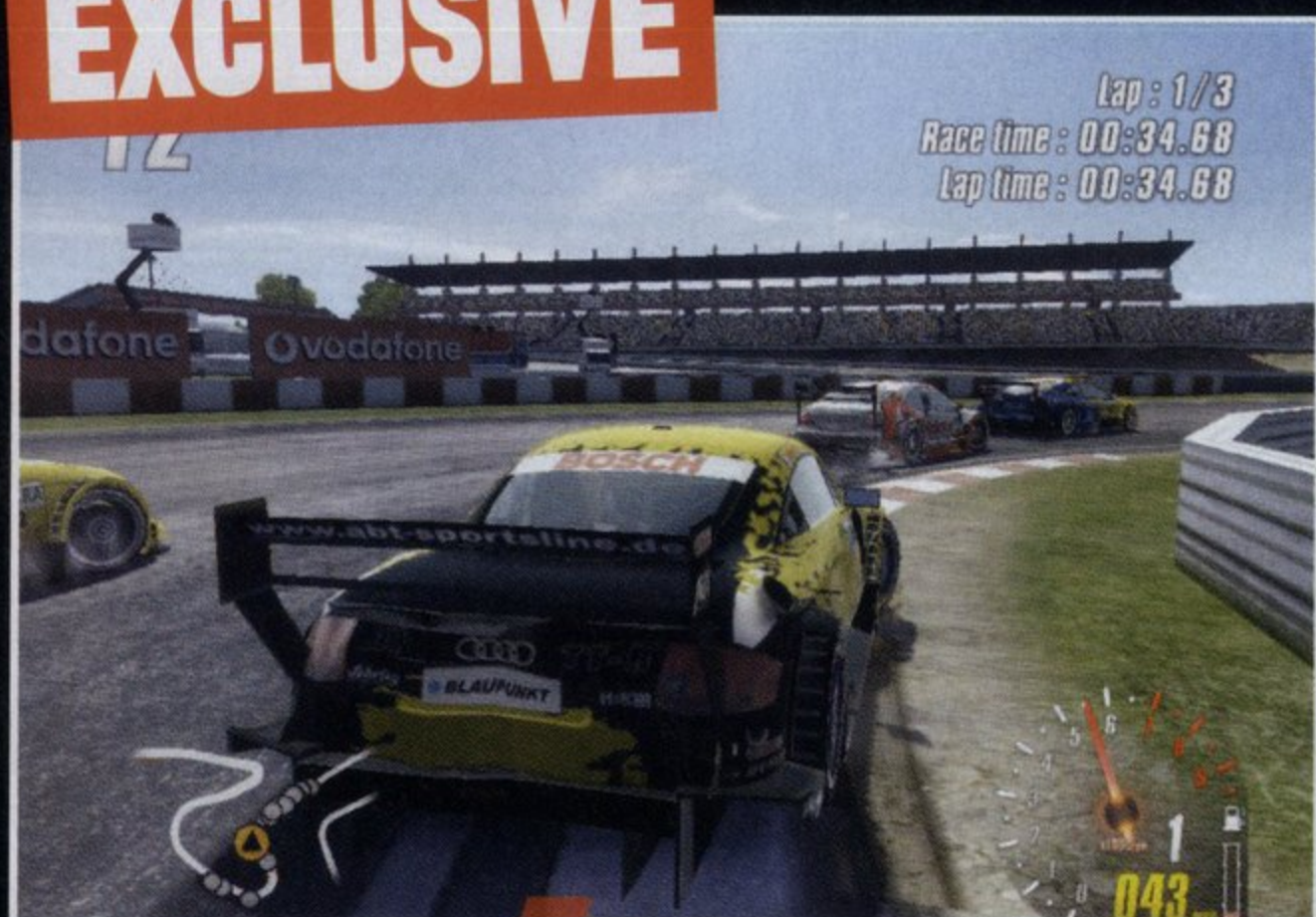


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**36** We visit the site of the Chernobyl accident – and find a gaming mutant.



## EXCLUSIVE



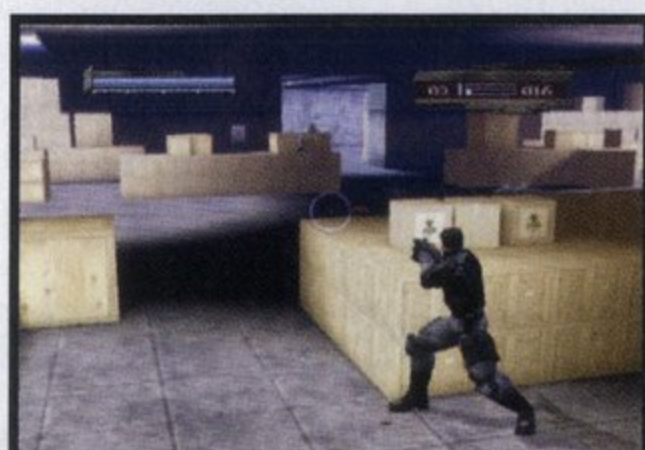
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# SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

# PIRATES!

If your first thought is that the words 'Of the Caribbean' are missing, then you really must read this. **By CHRIS BUXTON**

## DEVELOPER PROFILE

### FIRAXIS

Country USA

Established 1996

[www.firaxis.com](http://www.firaxis.com)

Founded by renowned designer Sid Meier and former MicroProse colleague Jeff Briggs, and situated in a sleepy town just outside Baltimore, Firaxis takes its name from a musical composition by Briggs. Having successfully updated Meier's earlier masterpiece, *Civilization*, Sid is now overseeing a team of around 30, a mix of *Civ III* veterans and new recruits, in creating the 2004 version of his 1987 opus, *Pirates!*

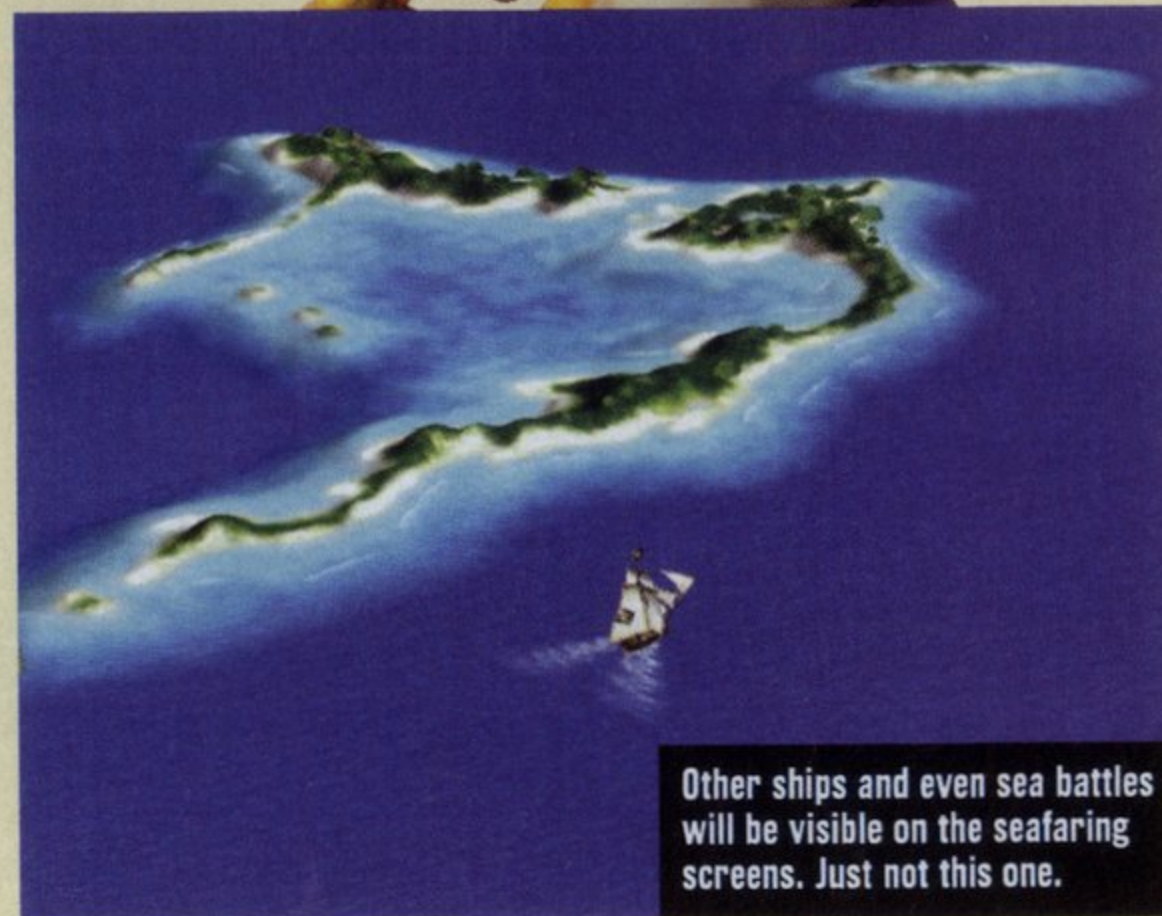
### Previous Games

*Alpha Centauri*, *Civilization III*, *Civ III: Play The World*, *Civ III: Conquests*, *Gettysburg*, *Antietam*, *Sid Meier's SimGolf*

**THE** pre-*Civilization* Sid Meier was already a designer of some repute in 1987, when his *Pirates!* first appeared on the Commodore 64. A deft blend of action and adventure, its design was very much a product of its time, as Meier explains: "The original *Pirates!* was really a response to what were role-playing games at the time, which we called, 'Pick up the stick' games: you enter a room, pick up the book, look at the window, very mechanical. We were going for more of a movie type feeling where you're taken from one exciting moment to the next."

And so was born the mini-game approach at the heart of *Pirates!*, present in both the original game and this remake; mini-games that include fencing, sailing, ship-to-ship combat, landfalls and more. These diversions, it must be said, were hardly an innovation in themselves in the '80s. From *Beach Head*, through myriad movie licences and onto Cinemaware's influential output, many a title used such things to pep up their action, but *Pirates!* was different. It married the short-term snap of the mini-game with a freelance approach, and it was suffused with that now-familiar Meier gift for making history come alive.

For the new *Pirates!*, it's very much a case of steady as she goes. "Really, the challenge is to try and figure out what was good about the original design and retain that," says Meier, "and then look at the new technology and see how we could apply that to the core fun of the original game." That means pretty new versions of old favourites like duels, and a much



Other ships and even sea battles will be visible on the seafaring screens. Just not this one.

more convincing sailing environment. Meier is quick to point out, though, that the more realistic look doesn't equate to a more complex approach to playing at being a pirate. "It's not a game about every single detail, about pulling this rope, those kind of things. We want you to live an entire lifetime as a pirate in the course of one game." Sounds good to us, Sid.

The story – *your* story – is king in *Pirates!*, but as to exactly what happens in it, that's left open. "You have the choice of which nation you're going to align with, which you're

**"ROMANCING THE GOVERNOR'S DAUGHTER WAS ALWAYS A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE ORIGINAL GAME..." – SID MEIER.**

Elton John will be very annoyed when he finds these two duelling in his bathroom.



**Release  
Summer  
2004**

going to plunder," enthuses Meier. "Do I want pursue this treasure? Do I want to go after different ships? You have this wide open world where you make the important choices."

All of this will be familiar stuff to veterans of the first *Pirates!*. Several of the new mini-games on offer, however, will expand the experience. Players who are locked away in prison can now break out and sneak past the town's garrison, while anyone who is persona non grata in a particular town can now try to sneak in there if they have a vital rendezvous. "There's also a dancing game," adds Meier. "Romancing the governor's daughter was always a significant part of the original game, and this is a way we can bring more depth to that. So, if you're a snazzy dancer you'll impress the governor's daughter and she'll be very taken with you."

Undoubtedly, 17 years is a long wait for a sequel, but Meier's earlier return to *Civilization* augurs well. *Pirates!*' bright and breezy approach really will transport you to another time – both to a different era of history and to an older but by no means outmoded style of game.

## COMING SOON!

Aha! We'll shin up the mast regularly over the next few months, and cast our spyglass to the horizon in search of fresh information on this old sea dog. Har.



■ **Genre** Adventure/Arcade  
■ **Developer** Firaxis  
■ **Publisher** Atari

- You have the freedom of the 17th century Spanish Main to explore.
- The new Pirateopedia will give you all the detail you want on the period.
- A mini-game approach keeps the action at a premium.
- It's a genuine classic – given a new treatment by an old master.

Fragments of treasure maps can be purchased from mysterious strangers lurking in taverns.



## UPCLOSE CARAVEL CANNONRY

The huge advances in technology since *Pirates!*' first outing might lead you to expect an intricate simulation of ship-to-ship combat, a la *Age of Sail*. Nothing doing. "The kind of detail that you might find in *Age of Sail* is great for a game that's just about ship battles," explains Meier. "But in *Pirates!* it's really an episode in a much bigger story, so we can't take 45 minutes to resolve one battle – the movie has to keep moving." The aim is that the mini-games and the story complement each other.



Duelling was, and hopefully will still be, played like a very old-school beat 'em up.





# SCOOP! YOUR FIRST LOOK AT...

# CALL OF DUTY UNITED OFFENSIVE

Time to heed the call again!

By CRAIG PEARSON

## DEVELOPER PROFILE

### GRAY MATTER

Country America  
Established 1993  
[www.gmistudios.com](http://www.gmistudios.com)

Gray Matter are developing *United Offensive*. They're the violent pups that gave the world *Kingpin: Life of Crime*, the hideously fun and brutal gangland FPS. They did some stellar work on *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, another WWII game, albeit with zombies and they also gave the world 1997's *Redneck Rampage*. Ah well, nobody's perfect.

#### Previous Games:

*Kingpin: Life of Crime*,  
*Return To Castle Wolfenstein*,  
*Redneck Rampage*.

**FOR** anyone who hasn't actually experienced the horror of war, nothing comes close to aping it like the original *Call of Duty*. In fact, the major criticism that game received was that it was too short and too sharp. Even if the multi-player is keeping bands of online brothers together, everyone's hankering for more single-player action. It won't be a long wait now. *Call of Duty: United Offensive* is on the way, and it's looking to be another eye-bleedingly intense take on WWII.

The add-on once again enlists you into a three-pronged assault on the Nazi war machine. You're fighting among American, Russian and British soldiers and each force has to complete one prolonged and specific mission.

The American assault is the infamous Battle of the Bulge, as the 101st Airborne attempts to fight off the Germans' Ardennes assault. The month-long assault saw more than one million soldiers tear each other apart in one of the most brutal land battles in WWII, and by now you should be quite aware that if any game can make you feel like you're in the midst of carnage like that, it's *Call of Duty*.

**"AS HOT AS A DRAGON'S VOMIT, THE GERMANS USE THE FLAMETHROWER IN THE CONFINES OF THE TRENCHES."**

The Russian campaign takes place over the 12-day Battle of Kursk. This remains the largest armoured battle of all time, where the Russians dug themselves in to protect their lines against the



Team-mates take cover.

infamous German blitzkrieg. Split into separate missions, it begins with your convoy being destroyed by Stukas. As you scramble for cover, bombs drop, filling the air with noise, dirt

and the sort of things only surgeons should ever see. It's all done in that hideously disorienting way that *Call of Duty* manages so well: the shellshock is as palpable as your heartbeat: the screen melts away when a bomb drops too near, voices slow and smear.

It's in this campaign that you get to see, and most probably feel, the new flamethrower. As hot as a dragon's vomit, the Germans use the flamethrower in the confines of the trenches to maximise its deadly power. Sadly, you can't pick it up and use it yourself, at least not in the single-player mode. The German Elephant tank makes an appearance as well, giving you a target to take down with sizeable aplomb (and explosives, obviously). Further down the line, once you've made headway into the mission, the tables turn and the Russians are put on the back foot, having to defend against a German counter-assault.

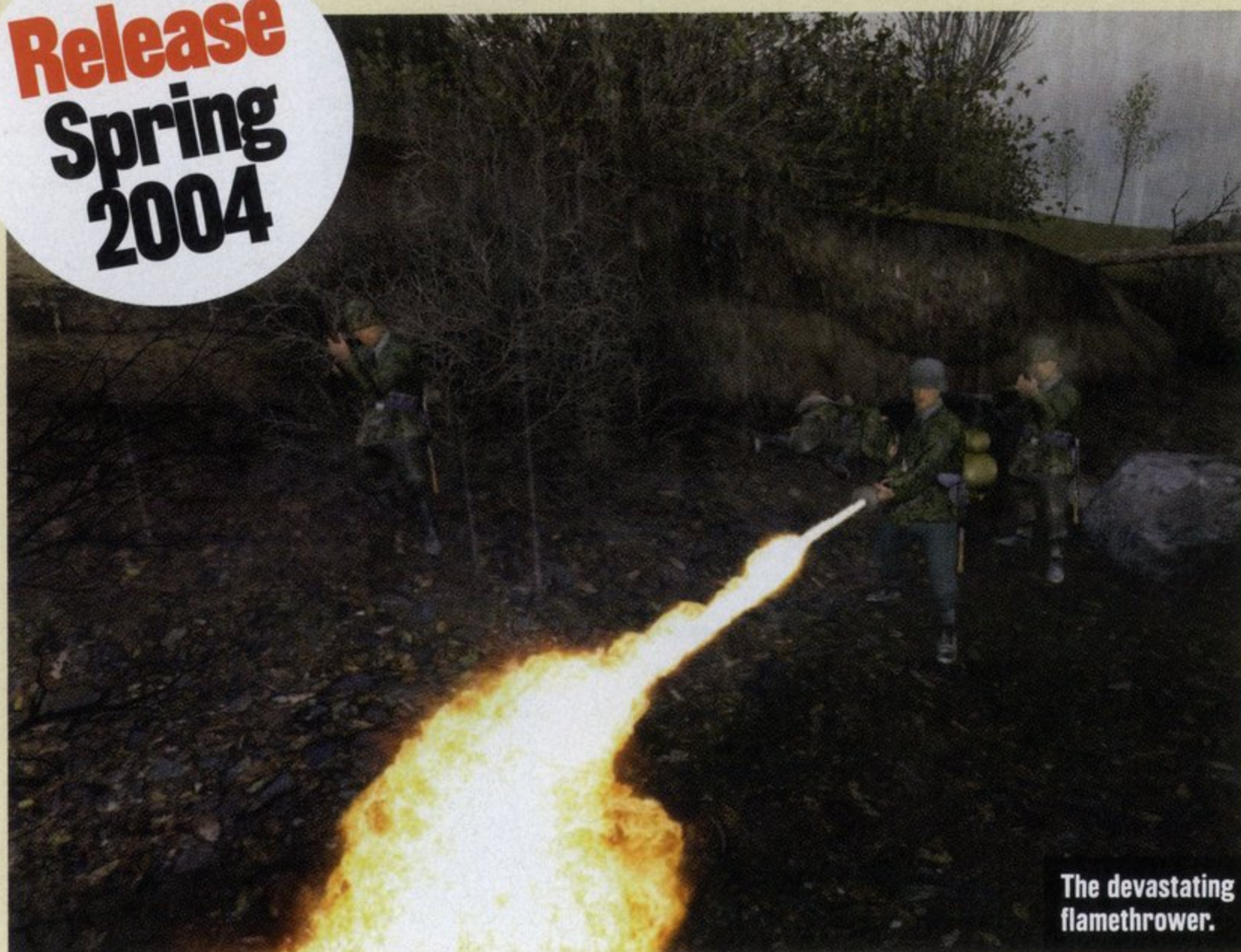
And the British mission is... being kept under wraps. But we have intercepted some details that suggest a slight change in theme for *Call of Duty*. As far as we're aware, at least part of the British mission will be on board a bomber, with you running from machinegun to machinegun, fighting off the swarms of enemies.

*Call of Duty* is still the most intense first-person shooter on PC and the expansion pack is looking to keep that flavour. The new additions are all subtle refinements in ambience: better textures and particles. For a game that was already brutally atmospheric, it can only add to the experience.

## COMING SOON!

As soon as Grandad stops telling me how he single-handedly took down Hitler and 'capped his ass', we'll have further news.

**Release  
Spring  
2004**



The devastating flamethrower.



■ **Genre** First-Person Shooter  
■ **Developer** Gray Matter  
■ **Publisher** Activision

- You already love and adore *Call of Duty*.
- It'll give you more single-player mayhem.
- It introduces the flamethrower to the mix.
- Battle of the Bulge! Need we say more?

The epic original battles are well represented in *United Offensive*.



## UPCLOSE BLOWN TO SET-PIECES

The famed *Call of Duty* set-pieces are still intact and with the scale of the battles you can expect *United Offensive* to be an impressive add-on. *Call of Duty* was built on a heavily modified *Quake III* engine, and even when it got busy on screen there was little slowdown. The same engine has been tweaked this time around so again you get swathes of enemies on screen, rushing at you with bloodlust in their eyes. Again and again and again.



Tanks rage over the Russian Front.



# EYEWITNESS

## THE PC GAMING UNIVERSE IN 13 PACKED PAGES!

### SPECIAL NEWS REPORT

# XNA: THE TREAT

Microsoft redefine Xbox and PC development forever at GDC.

**M**icrosoft have announced a powerful new games development platform at GDC, the annual Games Developers Conference. It promises to have far-reaching implications for both PC and Xbox games. XNA, as it has been dubbed, will provide a single game-making base for both systems.

At the most basic level, XNA is a set of tools that unifies PC and Xbox game development. Microsoft claim they're attempting to free-up the technology behind game design, with a number of current tools being consolidated and updated into one package to be used for both platforms. In theory, the tools allow game designers to create games much more easily, and without having to worry too much about the technology. It also means that, if Xbox 2 is created with the Windows platform in mind, then cross-platform development of games will become absurdly easy.

So what does all this mean for the games we'll be seeing in the near future? Microsoft demonstrated some of XNA's power with the video of a computer-simulated car crash-test, which featured incredibly realistic real-time lighting and deformation. The demonstration shows graphics far beyond anything the console is currently able to pull off, but not all that far from a high-end PC's capabilities.

Since XNA will be used as a base unit for



A still from the XNA demo video.

**"Cross platform development will become absurdly easy."**

both platforms, there are some interesting implications. The Xbox Live online model is now available to Windows developers. Live has proved a great success for both developers and the gamers, simplifying the communication process so much that it makes online PC gaming look horribly clunky. And it could lead to the connection of both platforms online. The same method that *Final Fantasy XI* utilises to connect both PS2 and PC users could conceivably be spread over the entire Xbox library of games.

Users of Xbox Live pay for the service, but it's a paltry \$99.95 for 12 months for unlimited access (plus ISP costs though). If gamers on both platforms can join in the same game, we're expecting a similar scheme to come into play for PC gamers. In fact, this billing option ties in with a recent proposal from IBM in which they've developed and tested a multi-player payment scheme for PC. We'll be looking at the serious issue of multi-player payment in a future issue.

Additionally, Microsoft are looking to create a universal standard of controller for both platforms. XNA will enable developers to



program for a standard set of inputs across both machines. Microsoft have stated the result of this will be a "family of common controllers for Windows and Xbox game players". As clunky as the Xbox controller is, no-one can deny that the headset technology has made online communication a thing of static-laced beauty. It's Xbox Live's success that brought online gaming to the high street.

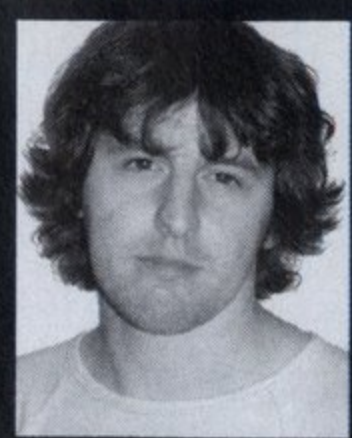
Taking a look at the planned release for Xbox 2 (towards the end of 2005), it's eerily similar to Microsoft's projections for its Longhorn operating system. Clearly with the





# FINTESS

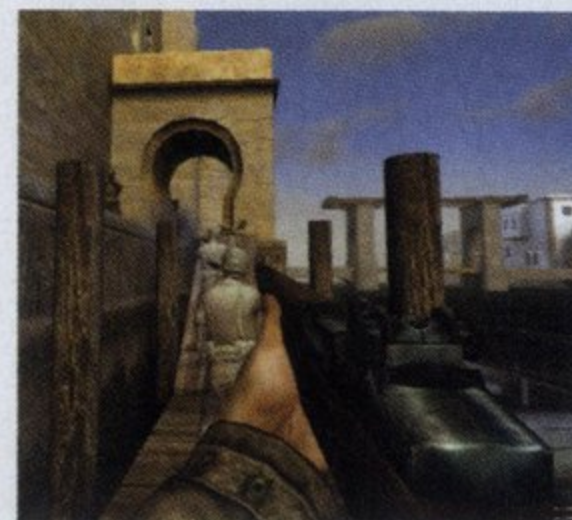
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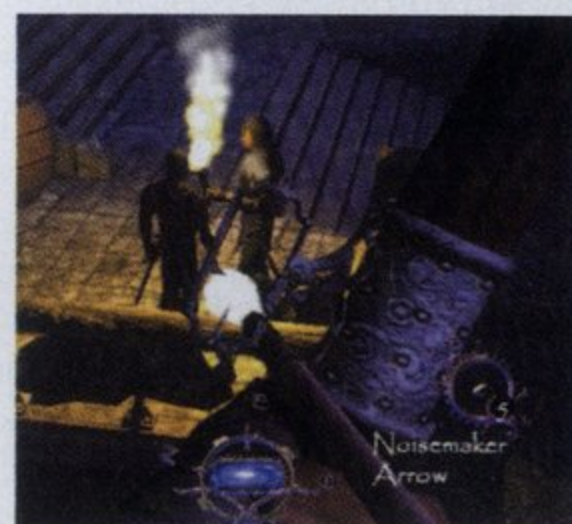
We were stunned by the news of Microsoft's plans to revolutionise game development. With our rose-tinted glasses on, it can only be a good thing: proper consolidation of platforms wouldn't have hurt *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, and the chance to take on Xboxers at *Counter-Strike* is something we welcome. Thoughts to: [pcga@derwenthoward.com.au](mailto:pcga@derwenthoward.com.au)

**CRAIG PEARSON, STAFF WRITER**

- 14 X-FIRE**  
A gaming instant messenger. Come join us.  
**STRAFE LEFT**  
Tim Stone sharpens his Pencil of Comedy +3.
- 15 EARTH AND BEYOND**  
It closes in the summer, but don't panic.  
**BFG LAN**  
A novel solution to the logistical irks of LANing.
- 16 ADVENTURE GAMING**  
The state of play in adventure games.



- 17 THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS**  
All new shots, direct from a vault deep within Eidos.



- 18 PITCH BATTLE**  
The latest in the football management battle.
- 19 SLICE CITY**  
*The Sims* comes full circle with this brilliant add-on.



- 20 DEVIL'S ADVOCATE**  
Get behind me, Satan! I've got an itchy back.
- 22 THE SPY**  
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Oh well, the Sims are back on top. Was inevitable no?
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Our genre experts pontificate.

## ALSO AT THE SHOW

### EPIC

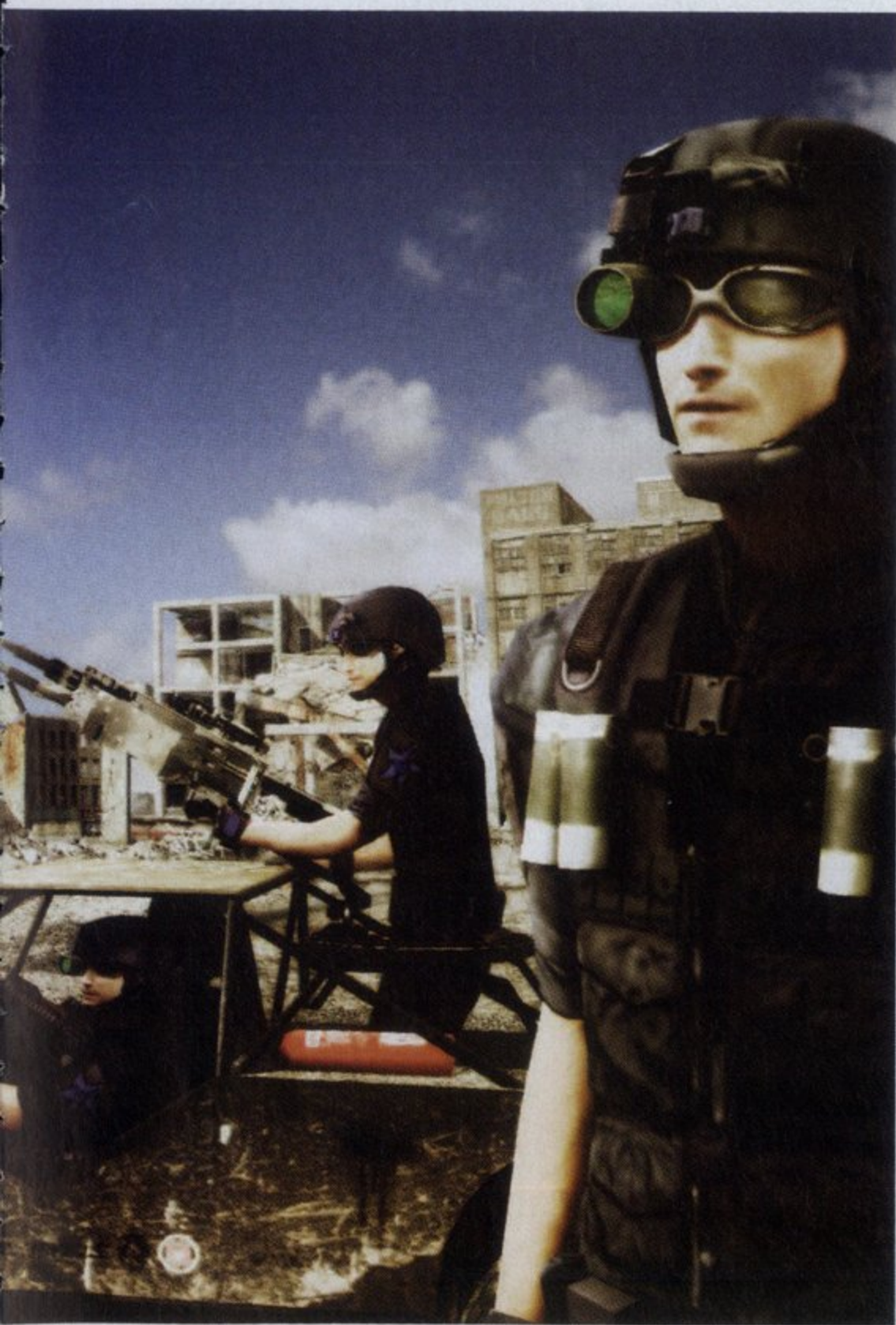
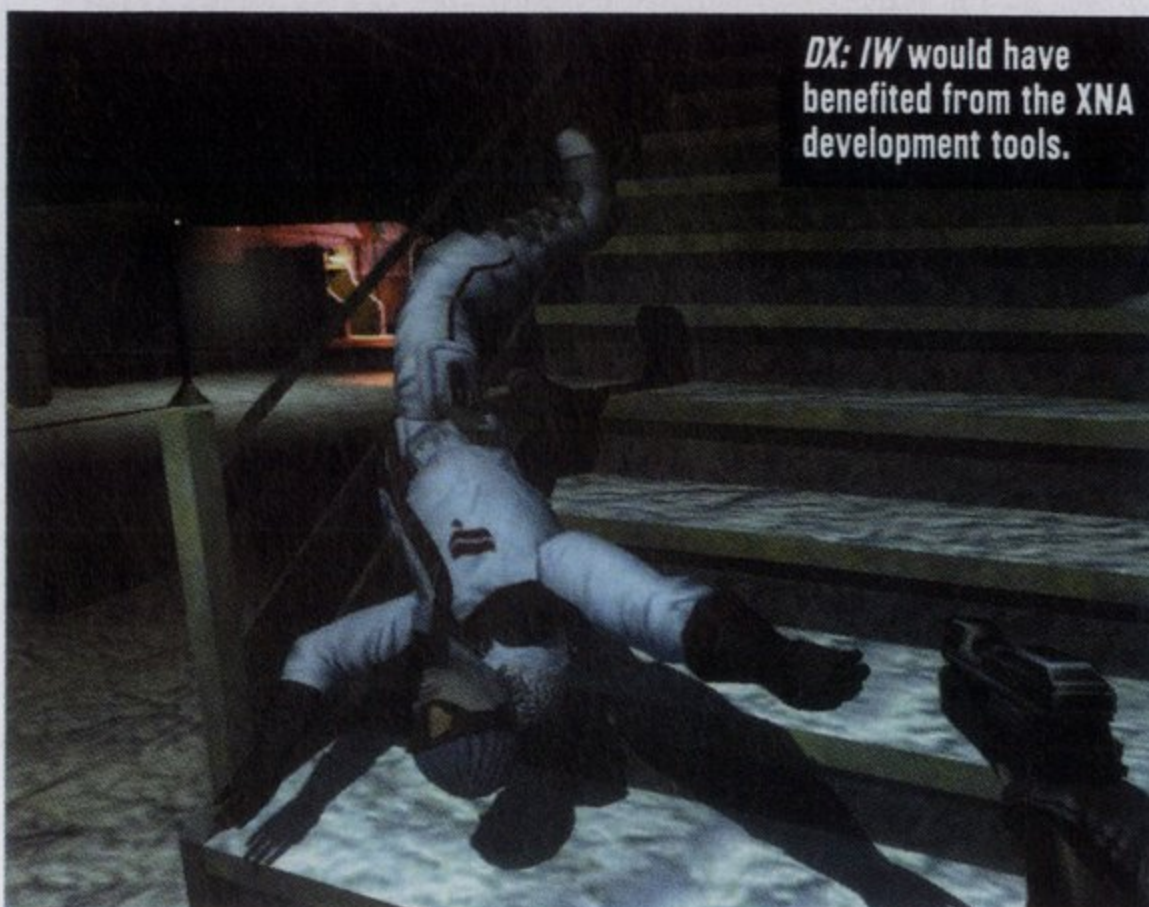
GDC this year also saw Epic showing off the next incarnation of the industry-defining *Unreal* engine. Games powered by the *Unreal 3* engine won't even be out until 2006, but the technology behind it is already producing graphics that some show-goers described as 'photorealistic', and hitting the same level of quality as Valve's Source engine. Looks like Valve won't have the next-generation gaming scene all their own way.

### ID SOFTWARE

John Carmack's appearance at GDC caused quite a commotion. His announcements of id's post *Doom 3* direction included mention of an all-new series that will depart from the horror-tinged action titles id are known for, and the possibility of a *Doom 3* project such as an add-on or expansion.

### VALVE SOFTWARE

Valve also made an appearance, demonstrating Source's facial rendering capabilities with *Half-Life 2* characters. We saw it all last year, but the expressions the characters are capable of are still spookily realistic.



Windows environment utterly dominating the PC, the consolidation of these tools puts them in a great position with the next generation of Xbox. If Microsoft can tie in their gaming hardware and their operating system as well, the games development scene will never be the same again.

#### Further Information

[www.microsoft.com/xna](http://www.microsoft.com/xna)

■ The XNA homepage.

[www.gdconf.com](http://www.gdconf.com)

■ Game developers gather.

**MORE GAMING NEWS OVER THE PAGE...**



## GOBBETS

## CENEGA SPECIAL



Cenega recently contacted us to give us a look at some of their upcoming games. *Creature Conflicts: The Clan Wars* is a turn-based strategy game, firmly in the *Worms 3D* mould. Two teams fight for supremacy of a small planetoid, firing missiles at each other to kill the enemy or destroy the ground beneath its feet. As the title suggests, each team is made up of animals, including kangaroos and foxes. No birds, though, so no chance of it having *Worms* for breakfast...

## IN THE SHADE



*Shade: Wrath Of Angels* is a third-person actioner, very much in the vein of early *Tomb Raider* games. So lots of block pushing and ledge-jumping, then. This might be news to those who knew *Shade* in its previous incarnation as a dark stealth game. Why the change? Cenega updated the engine and decided to do something different.

## BIG IN EASTERN EUROPE

In *Gooka: Mystery Of Janatris*, poor Gooka has lost his son and found his wife on the brink of death. He must adventure his way through the land of Jantris, using telepathy on those he meets. *Gooka* plays like an adventure game with a story that straddles the real and the dream world. And, as the headline says, it's big in Eastern Europe. For the latest on Cenega's line-up, head to [www.cenega.com](http://www.cenega.com)

## ONLINE

## X-FIRE

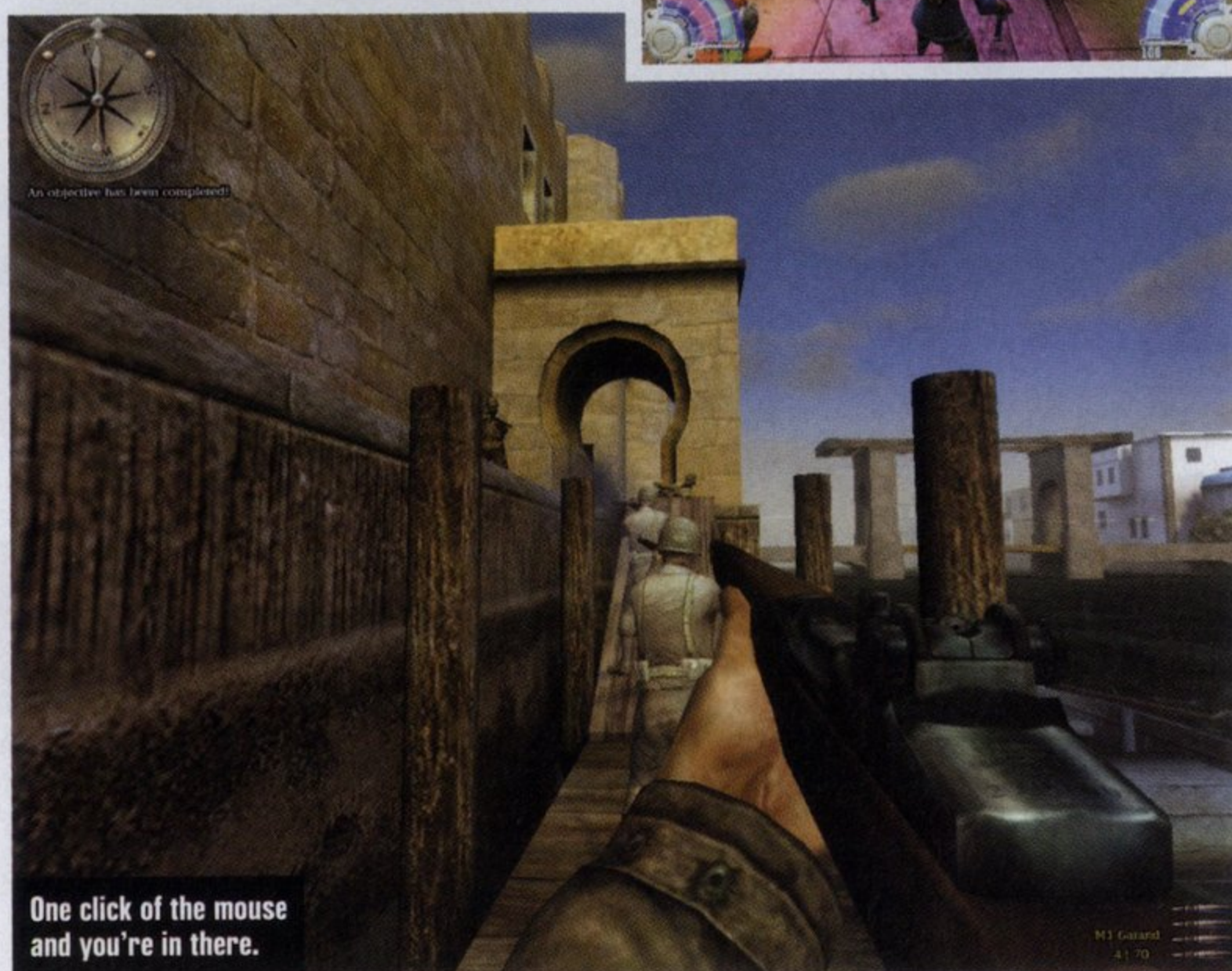
Find out who's playing what and where.

■ If you've ever wondered if your online buddies are in the middle of a WWII firefight, or pinned down by terrorists, then look no further. X-Fire is an instant messaging application that lets you know where your clan pals are, and lets you join them with a few simple clicks of the mouse.

It's one of those great ideas that we wish we'd thought of first. A dedicated

**"The list is expanding by the week..."**

gaming message system that lists what games your buddies are in, stores messages from those people who say 'hi' when you're in the middle of negotiating the sale of a Speeder on Tatooine, and generally lets the online world know if you're up for a game or not. It currently supports 63 games, ranging from classics such as *Everquest* and *C&C: Red Alert 2*, to modern blockbusters *Call of Duty* and *Halo*. The



One click of the mouse and you're in there.

list is expanding by the week. And through the magic of custom messages, it even lets people know if you're playing a single-player game and don't want to be disturbed.

It's a far cry from using something like ICQ, AIM or whatever, all of which are geared towards people that are cursed with being overly sociable, rather

than a more evolved (read - less sociable) creature like we all are.

If "Uh oh!" is a term that seems incredibly apt, we suggest you stop dreading hearing it and start downloading X-Fire.

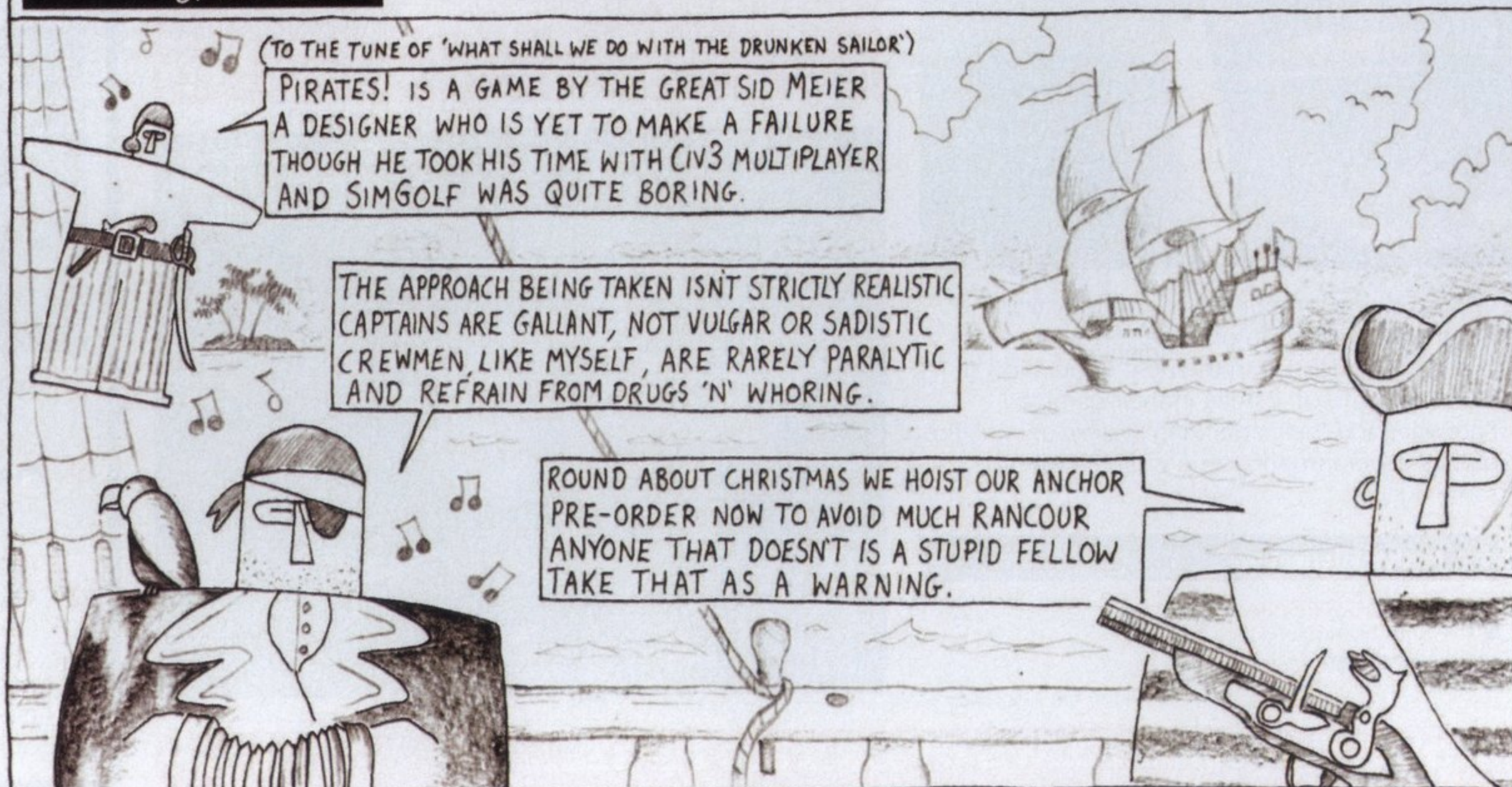
■ Release date **Out now**  
 ■ Website [www.xfire.com](http://www.xfire.com)

## STRAFE LEFT

BY TIM STONE

## ADVERTISEMENT

CONTINUE TO STRAFE LEFT





## SPACE SIM

# EARTH AND BEYOND

Space scavengers pick the carcass clean.

Electronic Arts have announced the closure of their beleaguered 'Everquest in space' game, *Earth and Beyond*. One of the first in a now-crowded market, the hamstrung MMORPG will be put out of its misery some time in the summer, leaving a black-hole-style void for lovers of online space adventures.

But all is not lost. Both *EVE Online* and *DarkSpace* have offered free trial memberships to *Earth and Beyond's* cast-off players.

CCP, publishers of *EVE Online*, received several enquiries from *E&B* customers and, as a result, decided to open up the curtains and allow users a peek at their wondrous universe. For ten days, *E&B* customers will have full access to all *EVE* has to offer.

Not to be outdone, *DarkSpace* are offering two-weeks' free access to their strategy-orientated MMORPG.



Carry on your space-faring.

It's a tale of Darwinian survival in outer space, and a telling one, given that neither *DarkSpace* or *EVE* have EA's resources. It just goes to show that if you give gamers what they want, you'll prosper. It seems EA's loss will be both publishers' and gamers' gain.

■ Closing date **Winter**  
 ■ Website [www.eve-online.com/enb](http://www.eve-online.com/enb)  
[www.darkspace.net](http://www.darkspace.net)

## LAN GAMING SCENE

# A LIGHTER LAN

Not light on the action, just the lugging...

LANs where you bring your own PC are nothing new, and neither are LAN gaming cafes where you just bring yourself, but both come with their own inherent problems. Our associate editor Dan Toose provides one example - he used to be an avid LAN gamer but having a huge 21" CRT monitor that weighed loads, and a lack of transport (he's one of those inner-city types without a car) made attending these things a physically difficult task.

LAN cafes get around this problem, but who wants to game on a PC that's not theirs? BFG LAN are a Victorian venture who have come up with an ideal solution. You bring your box and they provide the network cabling and monitors for up to 60 gamers at once.

They've addressed other issues that the average LAN centre doesn't cater for either, such as what to do when you need a break - Provide a lounge area with big screen TVs.

Groups can hire out the Box Hill venue for one of four 8-hour weekend sessions. Dedicated servers are on hand to ensure that the person with the best PC doesn't have to host the game.

All a novel concept, and likely to pioneer a trend to make LAN gaming a more viable option for poor folk like Dan 'Where's my roadie?' Toose.

■ Location **Box Hill, VIC**  
 ■ Website [www.bfglan.com.au](http://www.bfglan.com.au)



THESE ARE THE GAMES YOU **WON'T** BE PLAYING ANY TIME SOON.



## GROUND CONTROL 2

**Vivendi**

Those lucky PC GAMER forum users fortunate enough to get in on the beta had better covet their code that little bit longer. *GC2* is now listed on Vivendi's website for a July release. It's only a month's delay, though, which in this industry counts as nothing.



## DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

**Rockstar**

OK, so we're being a little cheeky with this. Head honcho George Broussard recently popped onto 3D Realms' forum and told everyone the 'done when it's done' line. He also made it clear *Duke* will not appear at E3 so the likelihood of us seeing it anytime this year has probably just halved.



## STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

**THQ**

The gorgeous Ukrainian shooter has a new release date: September. No doubt suffering from radiation-induced lethargy, the talented developers are adding vodka-filled spit and polish to their monstrous tale of Chernobyl.

STIPPAGE CENTRAL



## GOBBETS

## FRENCH FRIES



Been hankering for a bit of face kicking, fireballing and bitch-slapping in a team of creatures from all corners of the universe? Well you could visit the PCGA office when Ross is losing at UT2004, but why not take a look at the latest offering from French developers Cyanide. *Chaos League* puts you in the manager's seat of this fantasy, sport, real time strategy – FSRTS if you like. Nurture or torture your team toward success. Magic. Out in June... or not.

## SAGA OF HEROIN?

Two game gods, Brad McQuaid and Jeff Butler, the brain boxes behind runaway hit *Everquest*, are currently working on what looks to be a rather promising third generation MMORPG. Backed by publishers Microsoft, *Vanguard – Saga of Heroes* will immerse the player in the high fantasy setting we know and love. A third generation MMORPG might seem a way off yet, however new developers Sigil are keen to learn much from the new players in town. Travel to [www.vanguardsoh.com](http://www.vanguardsoh.com)

## GOOD GASWORK

Designer designers, much like designer clothing, are popular in the industry. Unfortunately you can't buy bootleg designers from Thailand for a fraction of the price, so EA have struck a deal with the original Chris Taylor (of *Total Annihilation* fame) and his Gas Powered Games, to work on a new RTS for the PC. Speculation suggests the game will be called *Supreme Commander*, release date 2006! So no holding your breath, as we'd hate to be held responsible for your case of asphyxiation.

## ADVENTURE

## IT'S NOT ALL OVER

Adventure game daddy flees genre....  
Use 'wet towel' on 'forehead'.

The gaming world is reeling in shock. Development of the adventure game's Holy Grail: *Sam and Max: Freelance Police* is being put on hold. It's the second LucasArts adventure game to be put to sleep, with *Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels* going the way of the dodo last year.

Both games are now lost to us, but for very different reasons. *Full Throttle* simply wasn't living up to LucasArts' high standards, and *Sam and Max* apparently isn't financially viable at the moment.

Website [www.mixnmojo.com](http://www.mixnmojo.com) led the charge, asking disappointed fans to write to and e-mail the LucasArts PR team. At the time of going to press, the online petition stood at over 21,000

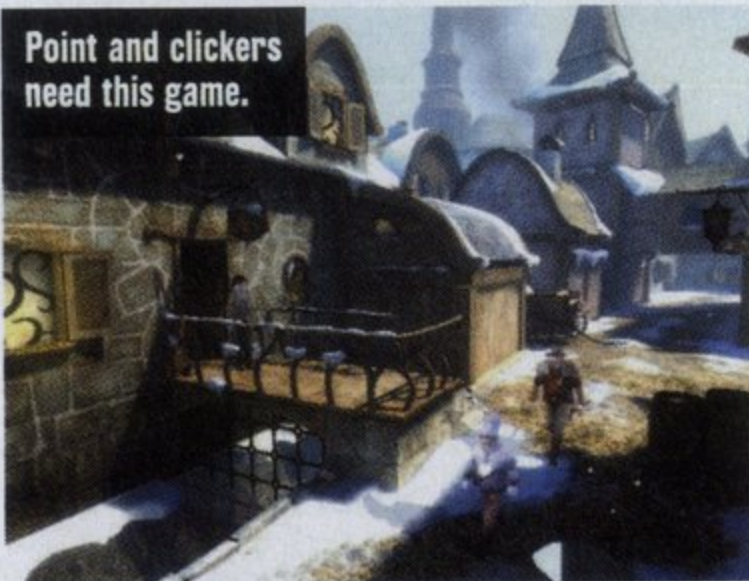
signatures in support of rescuing *Sam and Max*. The problem is that LucasArts have done the maths and decided against funding further development for a release at this time. Sometimes difficult decisions have to be made, and the popularity and sheer genius of the original makes this a particularly hard one.

But adventure gamers needn't despair just yet: there are still some interesting prospects on the horizon.

**"Sam and Max isn't financially viable."**

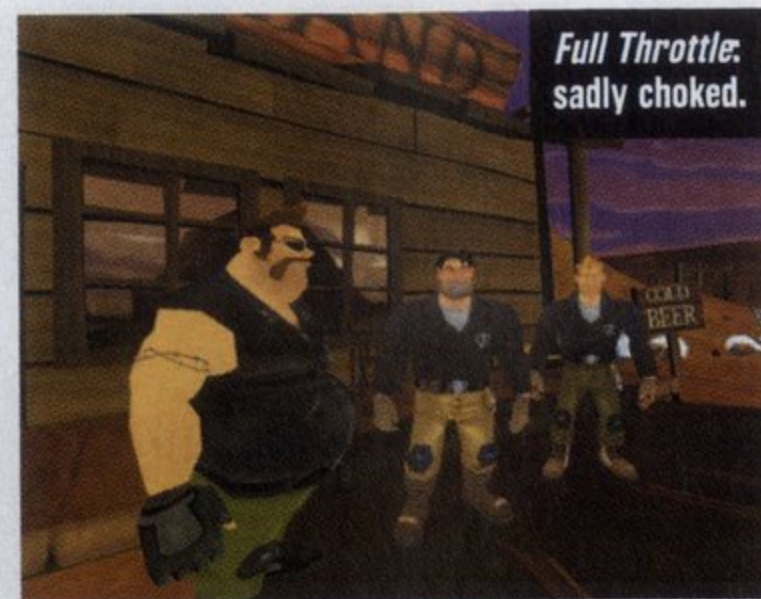
Charles Cecil has just announced a sequel to *Beneath a Steel Sky*. The revelation came when it was discovered that Revolution Software had registered [www.steel-sky2.com](http://www.steel-sky2.com) and they were forced to announce that work is underway. The original *Beneath a Steel Sky* was one of the best adventure games of the 90s, and its release gave Revolution a high profile. If you haven't played it, head on over to

Point and clickers need this game.

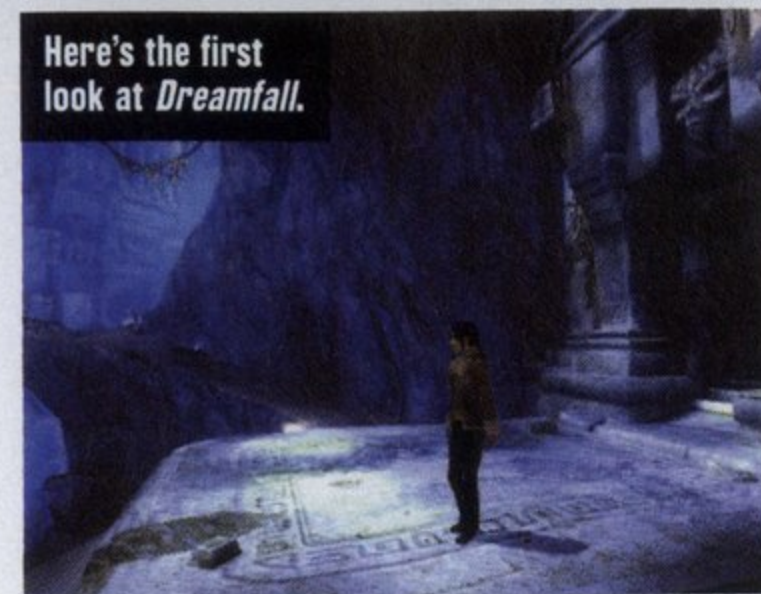


Adventure gaming's next hope. The weight of a whole genre rests on *Dreamfall's* shoulders.

Full Throttle: sadly choked.



Here's the first look at *Dreamfall*.



[www.revolution.co.uk](http://www.revolution.co.uk) and download it. You'll need SCUMMVM to play it and you can find that at [www.scummvm.org](http://www.scummvm.org). You won't be disappointed.

The sequel to *The Longest Journey* is also in the works.

*Dreamfall* will continue the story of April Ryan, who fought her way through dreams and reality. This time the 23rd Century tale sees a young woman discovering a dream-related conspiracy that could bring about the destruction of society.

There are some weighty issues tackled here, and it just goes to show that the genre can survive in both the comedic and the darker arenas. We'll have a more in-depth look at both games as they progress.

So there is some light at the end of the tunnel. *Sam and Max* may be gone for now, but it could be resurrected at any time. There are at least two big-name adventures in production, and let's not forget the on-going rumour of *Monkey Island 5*.

But there's no denying that the dearth of adventure games out there means it's pretty bleak for fans. You need as much patience waiting for the next one as you need taking on a particularly tricky puzzle. Let's hope adventure gamers can put up with all the waiting.



And they look so happy... sniff.



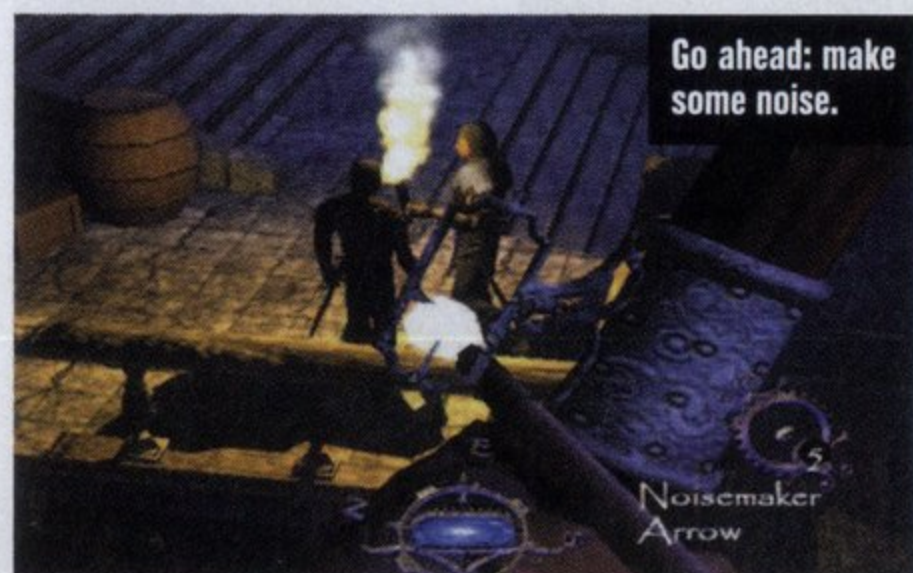
## STEALTH

# THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Or as the internet would say: 'Tehif'.

As the master thief prepares himself for an exclusive visit to PCGA towers next issue, we thought we'd give you a sneak preview with the help of these three screenshots.

The most interesting shows off Garrett's new climbing ability. He can now scale walls without



the need for a rope, which should open up *Thiefs* already open areas even more. These shots also show off the lighting system beautifully – look at the shadow cast on the wall behind Garrett.

The new third-person perspective has caused some worry in internetland, but you can see here how it could prove a useful tool. The awareness you get from pulling back lets you keep a peripheral check on the guards' positions. Remember, you can be hunted as well, so a third-person mode will let you know if someone's sneaking up on you. It also works well in combat mode, giving you more scope for dodging.

Lastly, the inclusion of the noisemaker arrow shows there will still be plenty of old favourites in the new game for hardcore fans. Look at the shadow cast by the guard's torch; a first for the series. It now looks as if hiding in a corner is even



more dangerous than it used to be. The guards can hunt in every corner, nook and cranny for your thieving hide. This, allied with a much improved AI system that has the guards communicating more effectively with each other will create a more challenging experience. Much more next issue.

■ Release date **Winter**

■ Website [www.thief3.com](http://www.thief3.com)

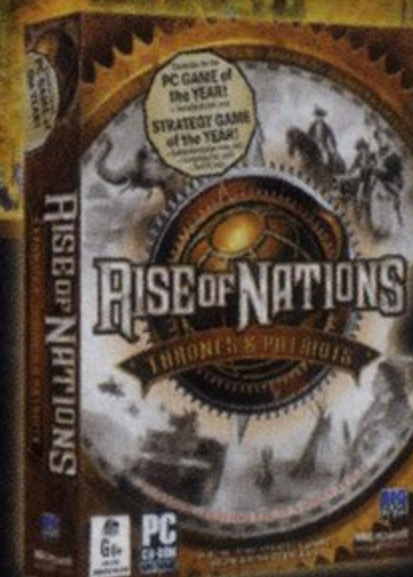
## TAKE YOUR TYRANNY TO A NEW PLACE.



'Thrones and Patriots' is the new expansion pack to Rise of Nations. Six new nations, five new military units, three new wonders and countless new opportunities to inflict your tyranny as you strive for world domination. Available now from all PC game retailers.



MAKE HISTORY



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## SPORTS

## PITCH BATTLE

ROUND 2

Sports Interactive and Eidos fire their opening shots.

The psychological sparring between the PC's two football management giants continued this month, with the first glimpses of both Eidos' *Championship Manager 5* and Sports Interactive's *Football Manager 2005* going on show. For those of you that have yet to give this niche genre a look due to a lack of interest in soccer, trust us, these games can actually make the sport more appealing to you.

First impressions of *CM5* indicate that we shouldn't expect a major departure from the familiar template, with Eidos and their developers, Beautiful Game Studios, keen to make the transition from previous versions as seamless as possible for the fans. There are some notable changes, however: the omission of the old *CM* sidebar menu and, most significantly, the decision to move player stats to a new percentage system. Senior Producer Dave Rutter sold it to us: "Scoring out of 100 introduces more variation between players, so they don't all get bunched up on the same numbers, allowing finer tuning within the match engine, and clearer and earlier feedback on training. So all in all, we hope the end result is greater accuracy." He's clearly still wary of a backlash from the *CM* faithful: "If we find out from fans that they really hate it, or it just doesn't work for any reason, then we'll rethink."

The 2D match engine will remain in

Thursday 12th February 2004

Joe Sheerin (AFC Wimbledon)

Manager Links Game

Player Profile

| Personal Details           | Technical Attributes | Mental Attributes | Physical Attributes |
|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Irish                      | Crossing 6           | Aggression 10     | Acceleration 6      |
| No Caps                    | Dribbling 8          | Anticipation 9    | Agility 10          |
| 25 years old               | Finishing 7          | Bravery 15        | Balance 13          |
| Born 1.2.1979              | Heading 9            | Creativity 7      | Jumping 14          |
| Height 173cm               | Long Shots 5         | Decisions 7       | Pace 5              |
| Weight 86kg                | Long Throws 9        | Determination 8   | Stamina 14          |
| Position Forward           | Marking 6            | Flair 7           | Strength 9          |
| Preferred Foot Right       | Passing 9            | Influence 10      | Other 8             |
| Value £3k                  | Penalty Taking 14    | Off The Ball 8    | Fitness 100%        |
| Contract Expires 30.6.2005 | Set Pieces 8         | Positioning 15    | Goalkeeper Rating 2 |
|                            | Tackling 15          | Teamwork 9        | Morale Good         |
|                            | Technique 9          | Work Rate 13      | Form 6-4-7-8        |

Selection Details

Injuries Slight problem with his calf, but should be OK for next match

Bans One Yellow away from an automatic 2 match league ban

Restrictions None

Fitness Match Fit

| Statistics    | Apps   | GLs | Assts | MoM | Yel | Red | Tck  | Pass | Sh Tar | Fouls | Fls Ag | Av Rat |
|---------------|--------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|--------|-------|--------|--------|
| Friendlies    | 3 (1)  | 0   | 1     | 0   | 1   | 0   | 0.36 | 61%  | 67%    | 4     | 9      | 6.00   |
| League        | 27     | 18  | 3     | 5   | 2   | 0   | 0.44 | 63%  | 85%    | 30    | 56     | 7.11   |
| Cup           | 4 (1)  | 0   | 2     | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0.26 | 61%  | 85%    | 4     | 9      | 6.00   |
| Europe        | -      | -   | -     | -   | -   | -   | -    | -    | -      | -     | -      | -      |
| International | 41 (1) | 21  | 8     | 7   | 4   | 0   | 0.46 | 64%  | 81%    | 50    | 88     | 7.00   |

Football Manager 2005 – or is it *Champ Man 5*? No, hang on... definitely *FM 2005*.

**"It may not be as simple as a two horse race..."**

both games, although neither publisher is showing their hand right now by releasing shots. Despite having to start from the ground up with *CM5*, Rutter is quietly confident they can deliver a compelling match experience. "What the user will see is a game that emerges as they watch. There's no result seeding before kick-off, and the dynamic stats

like Morale will be visibly fluctuating through the game."

Meanwhile Sports Interactive's MD Miles Jacobson confirmed that work on the *Football Manager 2005* engine is also in progress. "Our 2D engine will be improved over the previous games that we've developed and there will be a new look for it, as there will for all parts of the game." Indeed the early shots of work in progress show a very different look from SI's 'previous work', with chrome-effect menu bars, and player images and kits scattered about the familiar stat-heavy screens.

They've also been quick to respond to BGS's claims that *CM03/04* was 'too slow', beginning work to ensure that the speed of *Football Manager 2005* will be fully tweaked despite the increase in the feature set. "We are confident of a speed boost, while increasing the level of detail and accuracy from our previous work," insists Jacobson. "What we will not do is remove accuracy for the sake of speed." Well said, that man.

Both teams are working towards a 2004 release, with every chance they'll go head-to-head for a place in our Christmas stockings. It may not be as simple as a two horse race, either. Word is that Electronic Arts will look to exploit the confusion caused by the SI/Eidos split and market their own management game, *Total Club Manager*, to a more hardcore audience. We'll have more on that and round three of the contest, post E3, when new shots of *Football Manager 2005* are promised.

14. Thierry Henry (Arsenal)

Forward (Left/Center), French (57 caps, 25 goals), Age 26

| TECHNICAL            | INTELLIGENCE       | PHYSICAL             | TEMPERAMENT      |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Crossing 69          | Anticipation 88    | Acceleration 96      | Determination 90 |
| Dribbling 88         | Creativity 78      | Balance 88           | Pressure 80      |
| Tackling 32          | Decision Making 87 | Jumping 67           | Consistency 90   |
| Heading Accuracy 65  | Movement 92        | Pace 95              | Flair 76         |
| Passing Accuracy 88  | Positioning 36     | Stamina 83           | Leadership 42    |
| Shooting Accuracy 90 | Team Work 81       | Strength 79          | Aggression 59    |
| Marking 73           | Work Rate 82       | Passing Power 82     | Bravery 72       |
| Fighting 86          | Concentration 82   | Shot Power 75        | Confidence 93    |
| First Touch 91       | Vision 81          | Head Power 58        | Versatility 65   |
| Throw In Accuracy 50 |                    | Throw In Power 58    |                  |
| Goalkeeper Rating 5  |                    | Fitness 88           |                  |
|                      |                    | Preferred Foot Right |                  |

SELECTION DETAILS

Injuries None

Bans None

International Instructions None

Fitness Match Fit

Condition 100%

Morale Good

STATISTICS (FORM)

|                 | APPS | GLS | ASST | MoM | YEL | RED | TCK | PASS | SH TAR | FLS | FLS AG | AVR |
|-----------------|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|--------|-----|--------|-----|
| Non Competitive |      |     |      |     |     |     |     |      |        |     |        |     |
| League          |      |     |      |     |     |     |     |      |        |     |        |     |
| Cup             |      |     |      |     |     |     |     |      |        |     |        |     |
| Continental     |      |     |      |     |     |     |     |      |        |     |        |     |
| International   |      |     |      |     |     |     |     |      |        |     |        |     |

Ah, now that's definitely *CM5*. Mmm, lovely stats.

## GOBBETS

UT POO  
THOUSAND AND  
FOUR!



This is the best thing in a game, ever. One of the hidden vehicles in *UT2004* is a toilet on wheels: the TC-1200. A crapper on a cart, if you will. It was made as a joke, and kept hidden within the game code. There are no weapons or vehicle sounds to go with it, but it's well worth the very small bit of typing you need to get it. Hit TAB and type in (minus the quotes) "summon OnslaughtFull.ONSGen ericSD". The bog will spawn. You can even spawn a fleet, for optimum hilarity.

## BETA NOT



Kuma have released their public beta of *Kuma War*, the controversial game which is all about recreating the latest real-life conflicts as soon as possible. Head over to [www.kumawar.com](http://www.kumawar.com) to download the constantly updating client. This latest teaser is set during 1996, to tie in with the current, and definitely gameworthy, Korean crisis.

## NOT BILL, STAR

We're probably risking a bit of a backlash with our editorialising on this: *Stargate SG-1*, the uber-awful TV show based on the terrible movie will be coming to a PC pretty soon. JoWood, makers of *Spellforce* and the upcoming *Soldner*, have announced the development of the game through our Aussie developers Perception.

[www.perception.com.au](http://www.perception.com.au)



## GOBBETS

### BOTMATCHED



Epic have taken the first steps to control online cheating in *Unreal Tournament 2004*, by banning the CD-keys of known cheaters from most servers. In a tersely-worded screen, flashed up to the first cheater, Zellius, Epic said, "Your CD-Key has been banned by the master server. This ban will remain in place until you realise your mistake. You like playing with bots... now you only get to play with them." Hopefully this will extend to piracy. It's about time folks who think it's their god-given right to get a copy of every game they want for free to start dealing with reality. Grow up.

## MANAGEMENT

# SLICE CITY

## The Sim-Sims.

It was bound to happen sooner or later: you can now play a *Sim City*-style game in *The Sims*. The enterprising and downright clever coders at Sim Slice have released the wonderfully named *SliceCity*, and with this add-on *The Sims* comes full circle.

The game-in-a-game enables your Sims to control and build their own city, with the task of keeping it crime and pollution free. The happier the people, the bigger the population. But it can all go pear-shaped and bad city planners can expect to see plumes of smoke rising from their toy town.

*SliceCity* is a well-integrated add-on. Simply plonk the game down on the floor



of your Sims' apartment and let them get on with it. If your city gets too big for your Sim, you can hire... a gardener. Not only will he look after the greenery, he'll help care for *SliceCity* as well.

The website even gives you add-ons to download, so you can customise the city that your Sims create, and it's

constantly updated. If you want to try it out, be advised that it works better with *The Sims Deluxe* or the *Livin' It Up* expansion pack.

■ Release date **Out now**

■ Website [www.simslice.com/SliceCity.htm](http://www.simslice.com/SliceCity.htm)

# TAKE YOUR TYRANNY TO A NEW PLACE.



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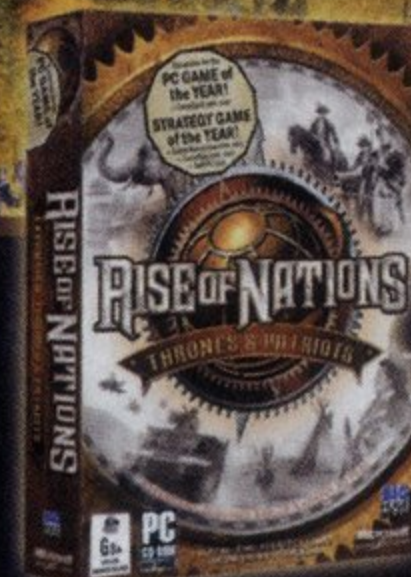






ILLUSTRATION: STEVE LILLIE

# DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

## RANTINGS FROM THE SOAPBOX OF GAMING

SO WHY ARE VIDEO GAMES SUCH A MALE DOMINATED ENTERTAINMENT PHENOMENA? IS IT THE CONTENT OF THE GAMES, OR THE MALE GAMERS THEMSELVES THAT DRIVE WOMEN AWAY?

**E**ver noticed how few female gamers you see at the big LAN events? Why is that? A few idiots will declare it's because women are no good at games and don't want to compete. They may judge this on the evidence of watching their sister having a go at an FPS for the first time who they laugh at for killing herself repeatedly. Of course the same people probably think it also has something to do with men being better soldiers, when the reality of it is that males have been used as soldiers throughout history because it only takes a low number of men to repopulate a land that takes huge casualties.

Anyhow, back to gaming, starting with the content of video games themselves. Right now we're entering the golden age of gaming, and if you're the kind of veteran that thinks of the pioneering years as the best, consider this - video gaming is now the world's largest entertainment industry. With that in mind, surely more than a few games should be geared to female audience, or at the very least, not geared towards a male audience. Some of you guys out there will balk at that, declaring that not many women play games, but that is utter rubbish.

Countless surveys and studies have shown women use the internet just as much as men, and loads of them are using it for social reasons. So if that logic can hopefully shut up some of the people who think women simply don't want to use computers, let's now turn to PC games specifically.

What are the biggest selling PC games of all time? Speculation be damned - two of the bigger franchises are *The Sims* (just look at the charts through all your back issues), and *Myst*,

both of which have proven to be just as popular with women as they are with men, if not more so.

So with women clearly willing to play games, and also to use computers for social reasons, why don't we see more of them at LAN events, the 'epitome of social gaming'? Firstly, how openly sociable are these events really? Just because a whole bunch of gamers are gathered in one room, it doesn't change the fact they spend the vast majority of the day staring at screens. Also, although there are always exceptions (meaning that you die-hard male LANners shouldn't be taking this too personally unless this is giving you an awkward epiphany of self-awareness), there are a lot of guys at LANs that just don't seem to be able to deal with a female gamer like a regular human



**Dan Toose** was formerly a die-hard LAN attendee, but stopped going so often, primarily because his Dling gigs were seeing him finish at 6am, usually four hours before the LANs started. That and the fact there were more women at the gigs...

On the matter of whether or not dealing with guys at LANs was a torrid experience, it wasn't all bad, but it wasn't all good either. Mel explained, "It's true that many of the fellahs I meet at LAN parties have little experience with women, particularly women who play games, so they tend to initially react in one of three ways: fawning, contempt, or disregard."

Why contempt? Has this got something to do with my opening stanza? From the female perspective, quite possibly...

**"It's true that many of the fellahs I meet at LAN parties have little experience with women..."**

being. A friend of mine, Mel, a rather gorgeous young Asian woman who has done a spot of modeling and acting also happens to be a serious gamer. I wasn't aware how serious until she showed me the reels of pics of her at LANs. And before any of you email to ask, no we won't be including any pictures or her or giving her full name - I'll spare her the marriage proposals (she's already married). Rather than have me try and get in touch with my inner woman and produce an opinion of little scientific significance, I asked Mel about her experiences.

"I guess I do feel more of a chip of my shoulder about proving myself at LAN parties, both skill-wise and socially, because I know I'm being sized up." It's not all bad though as Mel continues, "I think once a girl has hung around a group of (guy) gamers for long enough, they relax enough to forget that she's a girl and treat her as they would anyone else. But for the first party, at least, there's always a period of shit-talking, dick-comparing and trying to gain respect, simply because as a woman you have to beat the stereotype that women can't play or don't want to play games."

Of course, it could also have something to do with the fact women are often presented as submissive prizes for leading male characters to win over with some act of heroism. Then again, perhaps there's a more important lesson to learn here boys.

"Certainly in games like *GTA3*, the portrayal isn't exactly flattering, but I get a kick out of the political incorrectness. And it's not like the men are portrayed particularly flatteringly either," explained Mel.

Maybe so long as males don't aspire to become like their video-game heroes, we PC gamers will be deemed more socially adept. Somehow, I suspect not.



*The Sims* - 'Chick friendly' gaming.



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M 15+



## GOBBETS

## RAG DOLL KUNG-FU



A Lionhead designer has released details of one of the most intriguing games we've ever seen. Mark Healy is making *Rag Doll Kung Fu*, a mouse-controlled beat 'em up. Drag the mouse over a character's arm or leg and flip it around to create a freeform martial art move. It's being developed in the designer's spare time and should make it out as a free download, but in the meantime head on over to [www.lhtimes.com/ragdoll.html](http://www.lhtimes.com/ragdoll.html) for a short interview. Make it a full game!

## QUIT STALIN

Fancy a trip to Moscow? Yes? Well tough. This is the best we can offer: Buka Entertainment have announced *The Stalin Subway*. Set in 1950s Russia, your job is to stop Stalin, the mad, ageing psychopath, building a powerful secret weapon to usurp the Bolshevik Party. If that doesn't excite you, then how about this quote from the press release: "Authentic weaponry, including those that have never been offered in a computer game such as anti-tank rifle PTRS-41, RKG-3 grenades, Molotov cocktails and flamethrowers." Quite.

## JOIN THE BANNED



China has apparently banned *Project IGI 2*. The reason? A level with an assault on a Chinese army base 'hurts China's national dignity and interests'. Hilariously enough, the game has never been released in China. We suspect that Chinese game importers live in fear!



## THE SPY

WE HAVE A LEAK! THE SPY'S BEEN ROOTING AROUND THE DARK PLACES OF THE INTERNET

**S**ometimes The Spy doesn't actually have to do any spying in his job. Game companies have suffered so many attacks on their servers, the net is crawling with hacked pre-alphas of games. All it takes is one cocky little cracker to put what he finds on peer-to-peer file sharing, and suddenly a major development team is facing huge delays.

So pity poor id Software: not only have they had to cope with the leak of more of *Quake IV*'s artwork, but now some industrious code jockeys have taken the leaked *Doom 3* alpha, and patched the damn thing with all sorts of bells and whistles.

The Spy has discovered the newest 'release' of *Doom 3* has added maps and a map editor bundled with it. It's also been optimised to run a whole lot better than the previous leak, and even includes drivers to help out nVidia users.

Anyone industrious enough to delve deeper into these dark corners of the internet can easily weed it out, and such is the release group's arrogance, they've handily left their website link in the readme file.

They claim they're only doing it because they're fans, and still have every intention of buying the full game when it's finally released, but a visit to the listed website shows off a pile of hacked games and ripped movies for download. Hacker logic, eh?

**"One half-dead looking fellow has guns sown into his arms."**

Even more *Quake IV* artwork is being passed around. The Spy's informants handed him a brown envelope stuffed with renders of some pant-wettingly scary looking malformations of metal and human flesh. One half-dead looking fellow has guns sewn into his arms, extra grafter weaponry spiking out of his back and no lower half. Another is built like a bull, body twisted to walk on all fours, brain exposed to the air and eyes sewn shut.

The Spy's favourite creature is simply a head grafted onto a small metal frame with four legs. The face is set in a permanent painful grimace. The most disturbing

sight remains the human with flesh grafted onto metal. It hangs from staples, with stitch marks enclosing the rest of the flesh.

At least id's losses are on a relatively small scale compared to the latest *Half-Life 2* leaks. The Ukrainian

version of the game, compiled from the previous leak and the Source code, is lurking out there. The Spy has it on good authority this latest version has some of the AI implemented. Head Crab Zombies and the Combine soldiers are now at a stage where they attack and hunt you down.

It's still a hugely messy version, but the fundamentals are there. This latest development doesn't compromise the final release any more than the original leak did, but it does show people are beaver away on the game, even as The Spy writes. Let's hope the hackers don't ruin it for everyone. Spy Out.

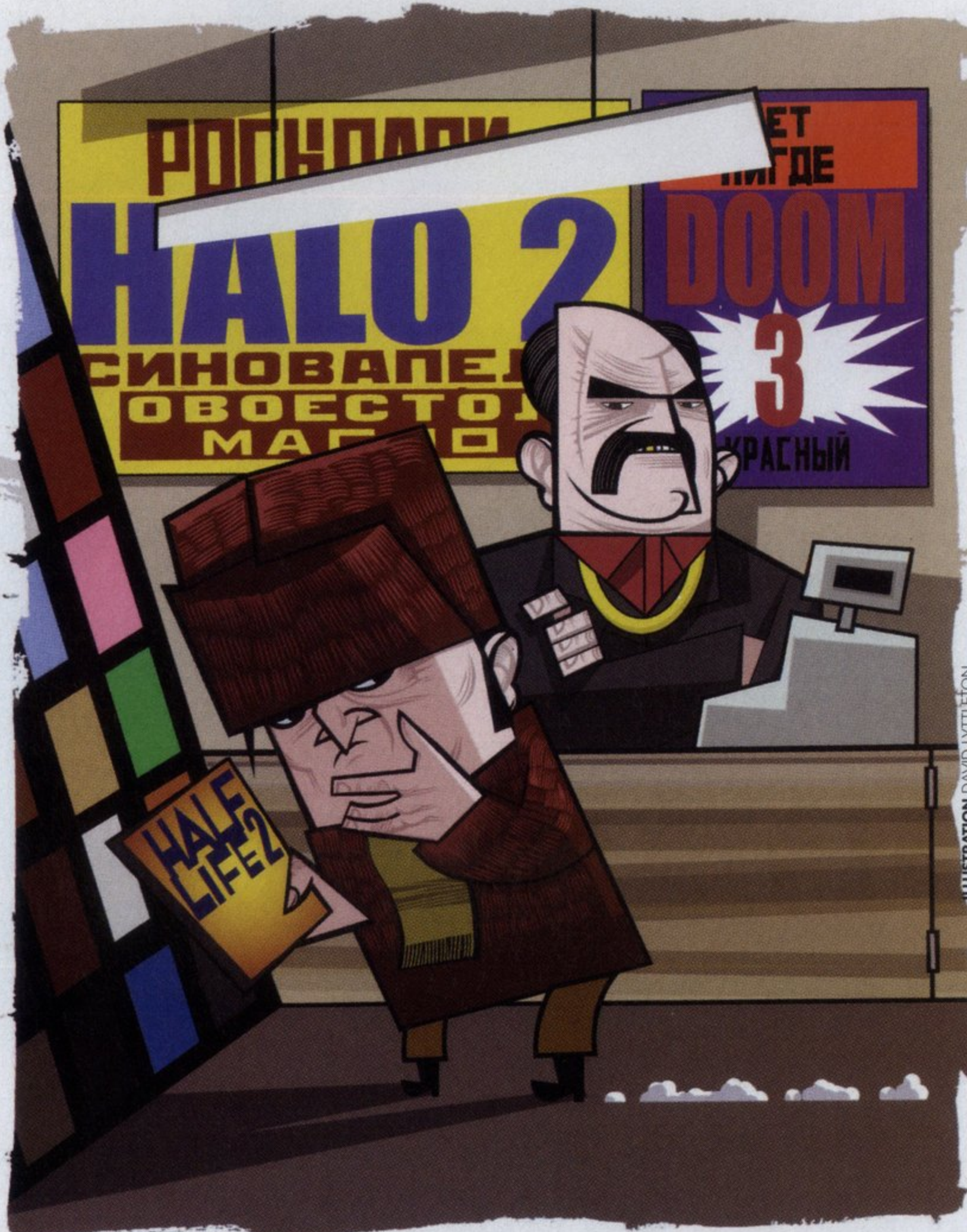


ILLUSTRATION DAVID LITTLETON



# THE OFFICIAL PC GAMES addict TOP TEN

|    |     |                                |                 |
|----|-----|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1  | (5) | The Sims Deluxe                | Electronic Arts |
| 2  | (7) | The Sims: Superstar            | Electronic Arts |
| 3  | (6) | The Sims: Unleashed            | Electronic Arts |
| 4  | (2) | Counter Strike: Condition Zero | Vivendi         |
| 5  | RE  | The Sims: Vacation             | Electronic Arts |
| 6  | (4) | Battlefield Vietnam            | Electronic Arts |
| 7  | (1) | Far Cry                        | Ubisoft         |
| 8  | RE  | Empires: DotMW                 | Activision      |
| 9  | RE  | Civilization 3                 | Atari           |
| 10 | (3) | Unreal Tournament 2004         | Atari           |

Charts compiled by Inform ([www.informbd.com.au](http://www.informbd.com.au))

**inform** Charts can be viewed at [www.informbd.com.au](http://www.informbd.com.au) as part of Inform's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly.

Inform tracks the weekly sales of business and leisure technology products, and provides detailed reports to subscribers and Reseller & Retailer members. For subscription or panel membership details phone 02 9264 0095. Copyright © 2002 by Inform. All rights reserved.

## PC GAMES addict RECOMMENDED

WINTER'S HERE, AND IT'S COLD ENOUGH TO HAVE A GREAT EXCUSE STAY INSIDE AND PLAY.



### Far Cry

91%

With its stunning tropical vistas, *Far Cry* is truly a far cry from visual tedium. There's a touch of the 'Nam about it too, as you crawl on your belly through the undergrowth, stalking mercs and GM-chimps with an arsenal of automatics. You *must* play it. Right?



### Colin McRae Rally 04

91%

It's better than the previous three (and by default, an amazing racer), but not by much. The evolution is subtle, but telling – slow, smooth responses to steering 'n' gearing, and the pace notes are pure class.



### Deus Ex: Invisible War

92%

20 years after JC Denton plugged tubes of nanites into his body and failed to avoid godhood, a new generation of agents is on the scene. *Invisible War* casts you as one of them, in this gripping, intrigue-packed RPG/FPS.



### Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

85%

Mr Fisher dusts off his trinoculars in this cracking stealth-em-up that follows in the footsteps of its predecessor, but brings a KFC bucket of multi-player love to the party too.

## DONE WHEN IT'S DONE

Key to charts New entry this month ● Sounds about right to us  
● Are you really sure about that? ● Yeah, right. Dream on, buddy.

| GAME NAME                                      | PUBLISHER              | LATEST RELEASE DATE |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Age of Empires 3                               | Microsoft              | TBA                 |
| Beyond Divinity                                | CDV                    | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Black & White 2                                | Electronic Arts        | Spring 2004 ●       |
| BloodRayne 2                                   | Vivendi                | TBA                 |
| Bloody Waters: Terror from the Deep            | TBA                    | TBA                 |
| Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth     | TBA                    | 2004 ●              |
| Call of Duty: United Offensive                 | Activision             | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Championship Manager 5                         | Eidos                  | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Close Combat: Afrika Korps                     | GMX                    | TBA                 |
| Codename: Panzers                              | CDV                    | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Conan                                          | TBA (TDK shut offices) | TBA                 |
| Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars                   | CDV                    | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Desert Strike                                  | EA                     | TBA                 |
| Deus Ex 3                                      | Eidos                  | TBA                 |
| Doom III                                       | Activision             | 2004 ●              |
| Duke Nukem Forever                             | Rockstar               | 2004 ●              |
| Dungeon Siege 2                                | Microsoft              | 2004 ●              |
| Dungeons & Dragons Online                      | Atari                  | 2005 ●              |
| Driver 3                                       | Atari                  | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Everquest II                                   | Ubi Soft               | June 2004 ●         |
| Evil Genius                                    | Vivendi                | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Freedom Force vs The Third Reich               | EA                     | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Fallout                                        | Empire                 | TBA                 |
| Football Manager                               | Sega                   | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Full Spectrum Warrior                          | THQ                    | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Goldeneye 2                                    | EA                     | TBA                 |
| Ground Control 2                               | Vivendi                | July 2004 ●         |
| Half-Life 2                                    | Vivendi                | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Hidden & Dangerous 3                           | Take Two               | TBA                 |
| Hitman: Contracts                              | Eidos                  | 2004 ●              |
| Jagged Alliance 2: Wildfire                    | Strategy First         | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising               | Novalogic              | June 2004 ●         |
| Kill Bill                                      | Vivendi                | 2005 ●              |
| Kingdom Under Fire: Crusaders                  | Phantagram             | TBA ●               |
| Manhunt                                        | Take Two               | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Men of Valour: Vietnam                         | Vivendi                | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Midway                                         | SCI                    | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Middle-Earth Online                            | Vivendi                | 2004 ●              |
| Operation Flashpoint 2                         | Codemasters            | 2005 ●              |
| Panzers                                        | CDV                    | Summer 2004 ●       |
| Perimeter                                      | Codemasters            | 2004 ●              |
| Pirates!                                       | Atari                  | Christmas 2004 ●    |
| Quake IV                                       | Activision             | Christmas 2004 ●    |
| Race Driver 2: Ultimate Racing Simulator       | Codemasters            | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Restricted Area                                | 4am                    | TBA                 |
| Richard Burns Rally                            | SCI                    | May 2004 ●          |
| Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots          | Microsoft              | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Rome: Total War                                | Activision             | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Ryzom                                          | TBA                    | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Sam & Max 2                                    | Activision             | TBA                 |
| Settlers Of Catan                              | Capcom                 | 2004 ●              |
| Silent Hill 4: The Room                        | Konami                 | 2004 ●              |
| Sniper Elite                                   | Wanadoo                | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Solar Campaigns                                | TBA                    | TBA                 |
| Soldiers                                       | Codemasters            | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Soldner: Secret Wars                           | Bigben                 | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Spells of Gold                                 | Oxygen                 | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadows of Chernobyl           | THQ                    | September 2004 ●    |
| Starship Troopers                              | Empire                 | Christmas 2004 ●    |
| Star Wars: Battlefront                         | LucasArts              | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Star Wars: Republic Commando                   | Activision             | Winter 2004 ●       |
| Supremacy: Four Paths To Power                 | Strategy First         | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Team Fortress 2                                | Vivendi                | TBA ●               |
| The Bard's Tale                                | Acclaim                | October 2004 ●      |
| The Longest Journey 2                          | Funcom                 | TBA ●               |
| The Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle Earth | Electronic Arts        | Winter 2004 ●       |
| The Lord of the Rings: Middle-Earth Online     | Vivendi                | Summer 2004 ●       |
| The Matrix Online                              | Atari                  | Spring 2004 ●       |
| The Movies                                     | Activision             | 2004 ●              |
| The Playboy Mansion                            | Ubi Soft               | TBA ●               |
| The Sims 2                                     | Electronic Arts        | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Thief                                          | Eidos                  | 2004 ●              |
| Tribes Vengeance                               | Vivendi                | Late 2004 ●         |
| Total Annihilation 2                           | Phantagram             | Autumn 2004 ●       |
| Two Thrones                                    | Strategy First         | 2004 ●              |
| UEFA 2004                                      | EA                     | May 2004 ●          |
| Unreal Warfare                                 | Atari                  | TBA                 |
| Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines           | Activision             | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Warhammer Online                               | Sega                   | Spring 2004 ●       |
| Warlords Battlecry 3                           | Enlight                | June 2004 ●         |
| World of Warcraft                              | Vivendi                | December 2004 ●     |
| X2: Online Universe                            | Koch                   | Spring 2004 ●       |



# THIS MONTH IN GAMES

WELCOME TO OUR GENRE-SPECIFIC NEWS SECTION, FEATURING ALL THE MONTH'S HIGHLIGHTS. DIGEST, THEN FORWARD QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS TO [pcga@derwenthoward.com.au](mailto:pcga@derwenthoward.com.au)



## THE MONTH IN FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

**THE** mod scene is the best reason to be a PC gamer. The bedroom coders hacking their way into the workings of a game and modifying it really can extend an game's lifespan.



And now they're working on demos. The first *Far Cry* demo has taken its fair share of brutalising, and there are now 13 mods available. They range from the seriously insane *Stunt Island*, where you fight tooled-up skeletons and hit ramps at high speed, to the purist's realism

### "STUNT ISLAND, WHERE YOU FIGHT TOOLED-UP SKELETONS AND HIT RAMPS AT HIGH SPEED."

mod where lots of tweaks and weapon balancing has made the demo a tad more realistic. There's even a nefarious mod out there that lets you fly the glider from the full game. The remarkable ease with which these smallish mods alter *Far Cry* show

just how moddable the full game will be. There are a couple on the discs this month, and we'll bring you more in the future.

The graphics engine that'll power the proper sequel to *Serious Sam* will made its full debut at this year's GDC

conference. There's not enough on this to make a full news story yet, but there was enough for us to stick it on this month's DVD. Those wacky Croatians... Odd sense of humour they have, with the looped laughter reels and monsters that

■ Craig Pearson



have a clear obsession with American football. On a technical note, the demo showed off everything from the huge detail-packed environments, through to a hilarious example of the rag-doll physics that involved letting monsters fall down the side of a cliff that had loads of logs protruding from it. It's like falling down a mountain of monkey bars.

#### Further Links

[www.FarCryHQ.com](http://www.FarCryHQ.com)

■ The *Far Cry* demo modded.

[www.gdconf.com](http://www.gdconf.com)

■ Annual game developer gathering.



## THE MONTH IN ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

**PC** gaming is becoming increasingly centred on the communities of gamers that build up around popular titles. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of *Neverwinter Nights*, around which



a horde of players have formed in order to play together, share tips, exchange custom content and have their questions answered. The result is a community that feels a part of the game itself – and this community has become so organised that

### "THE MANGLING ADMINISTERED TO MY MOTHER TONGUE WAS ALMOST TOO MUCH TO BEAR."

much of the best player-created content has been collected together in the form of a freely downloadable Community Expansion Pack. Included are endless numbers of new monsters, 'placeables', items and more. It's available at the community site now, at between 120Mb

and 200Mb – we'll aim to get it on our discs next issue for you modem users.

As anyone on the team will tell you, my capacity for nitpicking the English language knows no bounds. So the utter mangling administered to my mother

tongue by *Heart of Eternity* was almost too much to bear, but hey, I'm a forgiving man. UDC's fantasy RPG is set in a seamless world of forests, waterfalls and wizards; with the usual three character classes and a quest for a magical artifact. No doubt the quest for a European

■ Ross Atherton



publisher is also under way.

Finally, a quick word about Spiderweb Software. Indie development is not dead! Basic graphics abound but so does smart design. You can download their games *Geneforge 2* and *Avernum 3* at [www.spiderwebsoftware.com](http://www.spiderwebsoftware.com).

#### Further Links

<http://nwn.bioware.com/players/cep>

■ Including owlbeats and gelugons! Jolly good.

[www.udc-game.com/eng](http://www.udc-game.com/eng)

■ *Heart of Eternity* lives here.



## THE MONTH IN ACTION-ADVENTURE GAMES

**WHILE** mod teams for first-person shooters continue to earn acclaim and column inches for turning the latest whizz-bang polygonal masterpiece into the last one,



keen fans of adventure games work to push the genre in new directions. Thanks must go to the Crow's Nest and Adventure Gamers for their respective efforts to honour 2003's best independent adventure games. Both sites have awarded their top prize to the

### "BOTH SITES HAVE AWARDED THEIR TOP PRIZE TO THE SAME GAME: OUT OF ORDER."

same game: *Out of Order*, created as a commercial release but held back, simply to showcase the SLUDGE engine.

*Out of Order* begins as Hurford, the main character, wakes up from an extended nap to discover he and his

bedroom have been transported to an alien world. From there it's a very British adventure game, in the mould of the Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy.

While we're on the subject of freeware adventure games, it's again worth pointing out the excellent

ScummVM, an emulator dedicated to running ancient adventure games on modern systems. The recent granting of freeware licenses for *Flight of the Amazon Queen* (pictured) and *Beneath a Steel Sky* means anyone with the

■ Tim Edwards



emulator can now do a quick search for the original code and dive straight in. Best of all, our favourite uncle Charles Cecil has let it slip out that now *Broken Sword 3* is out of the door, he's already begun work on a new game: a sequel to *Beneath a Steel Sky*.

#### Further Links

[www.trumgottist.com/crowsnest](http://www.trumgottist.com/crowsnest)

■ Browse the nominations, cheer the winners. Cringe as Billy Crystal's second-rate comedy material falls flat.

[www.scummvm.com](http://www.scummvm.com)

■ A virtual adventure time machine.





## THE MONTH IN SIMULATION GAMES

**FEW** sim titles of recent years have contained as pithy a summation of the sim-making process itself as the recently canned *Falcon 4 Gold: Operation Infinite Resolve*. Quite



whose resolve gave out first – publisher or developer – on this project isn't entirely clear but falling at the final hurdle (a release build had apparently been submitted) doesn't seem to have deterred at least one of the involved parties from

### "REMEMBER THE THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE STORY WHERE HENRY GETS WALLED UP?"

throwing themselves wholeheartedly into another aerial endeavour.  
If the disconcertingly eager-to-please official site is to be believed then within a year the men behind *OIR* will be bringing us *Fighter Ops*, a modern combat sim with flyable Warthogs, Eagles and Falcons,

a dynamic campaign and fidelity to rival the famed *F4*. Even assuming the team can recycle material from their last labour, the timetable sounds incredibly optimistic. Also jangling alarm bells are claims of uncommonly close community

cooperation that look – to this jaundiced pundit – like a recipe for disagreement, dilation, and delay. Naturally, I look forward to being proved wrong.

Remember that Thomas the Tank Engine story where Henry gets walled up inside a tunnel? (Okay, maybe I'm a freak)

■ Tim Stone



I'm starting to believe something similar has happened to Microsoft's *MIA Train Simulator 2*. If there's a positive side to the extremely late running of this service, it is that the PC sleeper-set get to spend more quality time with *Trainz 2004* and freeware gems like the stunning South African steam loco pictured on the left.

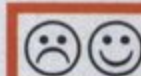
#### Further Links

[www.fighterops.com](http://www.fighterops.com)

■ Pie in the sky?

<http://homepage.ntworld.com/slsim/>

■ Smuts and steam among the springboks.



## THE MONTH IN MULTI-PLAYER/ONLINE GAMES

**GAME** addiction. Many of us have claimed to suffer it but few of us have risked life and limb for our craving. Over in the Far East, however, gaming is taken to the extreme. In China,



a 20-hour marathon session on a MMO game entitled *Saga* claimed the life of yet another hopelessly addicted gamer, doing little for the reputation of online games in that part of the world. Luckily we've yet to hear of an Aussie that's take the MMO

### "A 20-HOUR SESSION CLAIMED THE LIFE OF YET ANOTHER HOPELESSLY ADDICTED GAMER..."

thing that seriously that they lost their life to it (although some folks we know have come close), but the moral of the story is clear enough. Take a break now and again, folks. Fresh air and sunshine may be too big a step, but at least re-read this issue while the kettle boils.

It's easy enough to get hooked, particularly when online gaming seems to be coming at us from all sides. As developers get nervous over the size of the MMORPG subscriber base, we're starting to see a growth in cheap browser-based titles

springing up. Private-eye sim *Gumshoe* being the latest example.

Another title making noise this month is *Massive Assault*, or rather its online version, *MA Network*. It promises the same turn-based hardcore strategy as the offline game with a free deathmatch

■ Mark Sutherns



service available. We've included the full client on this month's DVD (we're good like that aren't we?). I'll leave you by sowing some seeds for an old favourite. Turbine have made the full version of *Asheron's Call* available for download rather cheaply via Fileplanet. Just don't go clocking up any crazy 20-hour sessions, OK?

#### Further Links

[www.gumshoe-online.com](http://www.gumshoe-online.com)

■ Private Dicks online, anyone?

[www.massiveassaultnetwork.com](http://www.massiveassaultnetwork.com)

■ Join the massive masses.



## THE MONTH IN STRATEGY GAMES

**MATRIX** Online Games' WWII operational strategy game *Highway to the Reich* (check it out at [www.matrixgames.com](http://www.matrixgames.com) – Matrix are the guys behind *Korsun Pocket*)



is getting a patch that doesn't just fix faults, it actually upgrades the AI of enemy and allied units. The patch also addresses historical accuracy issues and offers an

### "RARELY DO WE SEE SUCH COMMENDABLE CONTINUITY BETWEEN GAMES AND SEQUELS."

online matchmaking feature called Battle HQ. We'll have a review next issue.

More European tussles now, but this time, we take a step further back in history. Paradox Entertainment have just announced they've finished work on their grand-strategy title *Crusader Kings*. Set between 1066 and 1453, it's a simulation of the feudal societies of the time and follows

on from its parent title, *Europa Universalis 2*. Plus, those who've completed *EU2*, can load their finished campaign into *Crusader Kings*, and continue their reign well into

the Renaissance. Rarely do we see such commendable continuity between games and their sequels.

Those with more of a fantastical disposition might like to know that the *Heroes of Might and Magic III* expansion pack, *In the Wake of the Gods*, is ready for download. *WoTG* features new adventures, a whole stack of new graphical

■ Mark Donald



world-objects and creatures, and best of all, it's free. Fans of the *HOMM* games can find the necessary files at [www.strategyplanet.com](http://www.strategyplanet.com), but bear in mind, you'll need *HOMMIII* in one of its various incarnations to play.

#### Further Links

[www.hpssims.com/Pages/products/ModBat/NGP85/ngp85.html](http://www.hpssims.com/Pages/products/ModBat/NGP85/ngp85.html)

■ Operational-level modern warfare. Don't forget your Warsaw packed lunch.

<http://int.games.1c.ru/stalingrad>

■ *Stalingrad*: a strategic take on the bitter battle that helped win WWII.

# THE INSIDER

## UBI CRY WOLF, AND THE HITMEN ARE HIRED.

Ubi Soft have been at the sharp end of the wheeling and dealing this month. First up they've pulled out of the publishing deal with Warner Brothers for *The Matrix Online*, only a month after axing the online component of *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*. Another sign of MMORPG nervousness perhaps, particularly as the reaction to the Matrix sequels was so underwhelming. Yet the noise from Warner suggests that the online interpretation of the Wachowski's world is on track and shaping up rather nicely. We'll see soon enough.

It appears that Ubi Soft may have other online ventures up their sleeve. They certainly have the brains on board,

having snapped up *Shadowbane* creators Wolfpack in the same month. "The acquisition of Wolfpack takes our strategy in the MMO segment one step further," said Ubi Soft MD Gilles Langourieux.

The French publishers were not the only ones to strengthen their in-house development teams. Eidos also broke open the chequebook to buy *Hitman* crafters IO Interactive. The *Hitman* series has been a big multi-platform success, and the move suggests more sequels are inevitable. It also means IO's technology from the series and from *Freedom Fighters*, will be available to Eidos.



Another guilty *Matrix* coder takes the easy way out.



PART 1

# HALF-LIFE 2

It's still the most important PC game of the year. Gordon is coming. It's time to prepare. **by Tim Edwards**

**W**hy is *Half-Life 2* so important? It's a question we've taken to asking ourselves often of late. Why are we willing to waste hours dribbling over every morsel of information, pore over every screenshot, analyse every quote from Valve's mouth, for new information, new ideas, new factoids, or just mindless speculation? Why, on the eve of *Half-Life 2*'s big revelation last year, did we decide to devote an unprecedented 16 pages to the game?

Why indeed. Try this: on the day of the original *Half-Life*'s release, this writer drank an entire bottle of cod-liver oil, and threw up all over his mum's shoes, simply so he wouldn't have to go to school. Then he sat bolt upright in bed, fighting his way out of Black Mesa, out of the sewers, through Surface Tension, and out, across Xen.

Or try this: *Half-Life* is the best game ever. *Half-Life 2* will be better. We've been waiting for the next episode in the *Half-Life* saga since October 1998. Since





**■ MUDDY WATERS**  
The water has just the right amount of detail: it's murky, yet transparent.

**■ PIXEL PUSS**  
The latest generation of pixel shaders is used to create the monsters' oily hides.

**■ ICONIC TOOL**  
The *Half-Life* crowbar. Its return has become a focus point for millions of fans.

**■ BACK OFF**  
Every detail in this world is modelled. A single misplaced texture could ruin everything.

then, we've been chomping at the bit, desperate to continue our journey in the HEV-augmented boots of Gordon Freeman. While we've been drooling, Valve have been dreaming, creating a new chapter that's set to take us far beyond Black Mesa. And it's coming. We've just been over to Valve's HQ in Seattle for our first hands-on play of the game. And we can tell you this: it's everything we've hoped. As we go to press Valve still aren't ready to give a concrete release date. But if there's one word you can take away from this feature, it's this: Soon.

This is a unique opportunity: a last chance for us to get excited about *Half-Life 2* before it actually happens. Here's everything that we know about *Half-Life 2*. Here's what we think. And here's why we're more excited about *Half-Life 2* than we've ever been.

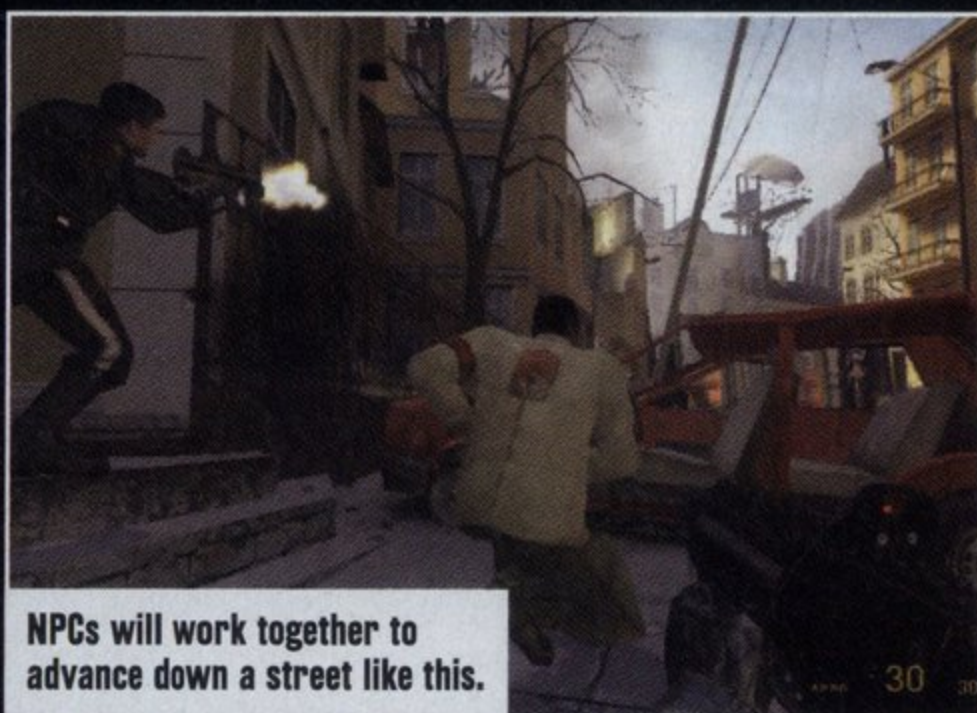
Think back to the final moments of the first *Half-Life*, when the G-Man stood before you, and asked you to make a choice: join him or face certain death. What's happened since then?

The startling answer is: you won't know. Valve are adamant that the time between the Black Mesa 'incident' and this strange new world is to be kept blank. Marc Laidlaw, Valve's on-staff plot-writer, has repeatedly professed his desire to keep the player out

## "VALVE ARE TOYING WITH MAKING THE STRIDER A DRIVEABLE VEHICLE."

of the loop. Interviewed by game development site Gamasutra, he said: "As far as the narrative goes, I live by two rules: Poe's 'Totality of Effect,' which has to do with maintaining consistent atmosphere and tone, and another unnamed rule expressed by the science fiction writer James Tiptree Jr, which runs loosely as 'Start your story 500 feet underground on a dark day and then... don't tell them.'"

So don't expect a great deal of exposition. There's going to be a great dark story hole, where you simply don't understand what's going on. Hell, the *Half-Life* series has been planned as a trilogy, so this chapter may just raise even more questions than it answers. Already, Valve are brainstorming ideas for *Half-Life 3*, including a



NPCs will work together to advance down a street like this.

further exploration of *Half-Life*'s alien threat, and maybe the chance to play as Alyx, the new female character.

But back to the here and now. What do we know about the world of *Half-Life 2*? Expect a very different atmosphere from the original: the confines of the Black Mesa complex have been abandoned in favour of an eastern European city known simply as City 17. The whole area is in the clutches of the Combine forces. They're an oppressive bunch, who've taken to brutally rounding up groups of citizens. Their forces are split between the Metrocops, suited and booted electroprod-toting soldiers, and the scanners: hovering robotic drones. The drones are equipped with cameras within a central iris that changes colour, in traffic light fashion, according to its alert level. On green you're fine. Amber is a worry. When it turns red, it's time to run. But the Combine's most terrifying asset is the Striders, enormous stilt-walking monsters, originally built for stalking the sea-floor. They're armed with a horrifically powerful laser that can blast through walls. Thankfully, we might be able to turn the Strider on its former owners: Valve recently let slip that they were toying with turning the Strider into a driveable vehicle. Cripes. Here's hoping they follow through there. The big question is: are the Combine the natural extension of the original, brutal marine forces, sent in to clear the Black Mesa complex? Or are they related to the even scarier female assassins, who then took out the surviving marines?

Returning from Black Mesa are the shambling head-crab zombies, although blessed (or cursed)

## WORD OF MOD

The *Half-Life 2* experience will be enhanced and expanded way beyond the confines of the box thanks to Valve's astute fostering of the online community. We talk ideas with two of the foremost *Half-Life* mod minds, Charlie Cleveland, creator of *Natural Selection*, and Neil Manke of *They Hunger*, about their predictions for the next generation of modding.

**PCG** What are you expecting the *Half-Life 2* software development kit (the collection of library tools for creating mods) to include?

**CC** I think there might be two SDKs: one initial SDK released before *HL2* is out, which will include the model exporters, the new Hammer editor, and docs on how to get started on artwork. After *HL2* is released, I think the full SDK (which includes code) will be released. I'm guessing the full SDK will have the full source code to *Half-Life 2*, just like the original *Half-Life* SDK had the source to *Half-Life*. This was a nice move on Valve's part, and it gave modders a lot of information. The main reason for doing it in two parts would be to make sure people play *HL2* before they play *HL2* mods, and to not give away too many spoilers.

**NM** The SDK should include the map editor, compiling tools, C++ source code (for the AI), a few samples and even additional tools to help in converting *HL1* mods to *HL2*.

**PCG** How long do you think it will be before modders can start producing quality games?

**NM** The converting tools from *HL1* should make it possible for some of the current mods to have a rudimentary version for the *HL2* engine within a few weeks after the SDK is released. This strategy should provide a quick start for the *HL2* mod community, but it should take several more months of continuous improvements for a mod to reach the *HL2* quality level.

**CC** I'm sure we'll see 'weapons mods' and tweaks within days of the full SDK being released. A project of any magnitude is going to take many months or a couple of years.

**PCG** What does working with the *HL2* engine offer you over other engines?

**CC** The main features I'm looking forward to are the animation systems. I don't know of their functionality existing on other engines. The Havok physics engine will probably provide richer behaviour over other physics behaviours on the other engines.

**NM** The strongest advantages of the *HL2* engine are realistic physics simulation, detailed facial animation on models and support for sophisticated script-based character acting. Those features should result in very interactive environments and NPCs, which is especially useful for story-driven single-player games. Unfortunately, creating a single-player mod requires so much extra work (for story planning, dialogues, scripting, NPC modelling and behaviour, multiple maps to explore, etc.) that most mod teams will probably continue to avoid working on single-player design and



## Having a Barney

just focus on multi-player.

**PCG** Will previous experience working in mods (and the HL engine in particular) give an advantage?

**NM** Sure. Valve promised to ensure that moving from HL to HL2 modding would be as easy as possible. For instance, they prepared tools to help convert HL1 mods and kept a similar interface for the map editor (although adding support for several new features). However, the transition to the new engine generation won't be completely painless. For instance, learning to manipulate brushes using the Hammer editor was enough to create a new map for HL1. But for HL2, much of the work has to be done using external tools such as Softimage XSI (for modelling, texturing, animating, etc) and then imported into Hammer for integrating those elements into a resulting map. That's certainly a lot more work.

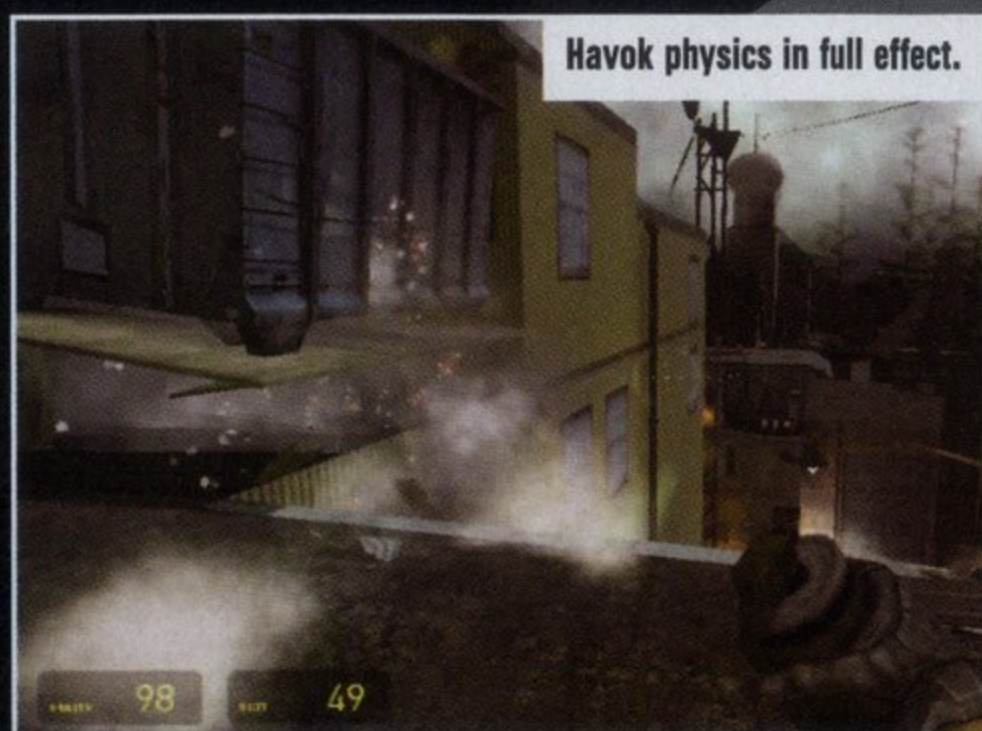
**PCG** Does working with the Source engine require a higher standard of work?

**NM** Certainly, every new generation of 3D engines support more detailed maps and a much higher degree of control over characters, effects and events, with means increasing complexity and a lot more development efforts, from sounds to models. Just for comparison, a top-level designer working alone can create a high quality map for Quake in a couple of days, for HL in a couple of weeks, and for HL2 it might extend to a couple of months.

**PCG** Steam includes the ability for mod makers to charge for content. What effect do you predict this will have?

**CC** This is probably the most exciting aspect for me, as it could transform the mod community. It's entirely possible that a group of one or two modders could actually live off their work. Once this happens, it opens the door for small groups of talented people to slowly grow their business into something sustainable. It may also increase the average age of people that both play and develop mods.

**NM** For mod makers, the perspective of making money out of mod development should be a strong incentive for moving into the HL2 technology. As a bonus, Steam also enables Valve to sell their next games



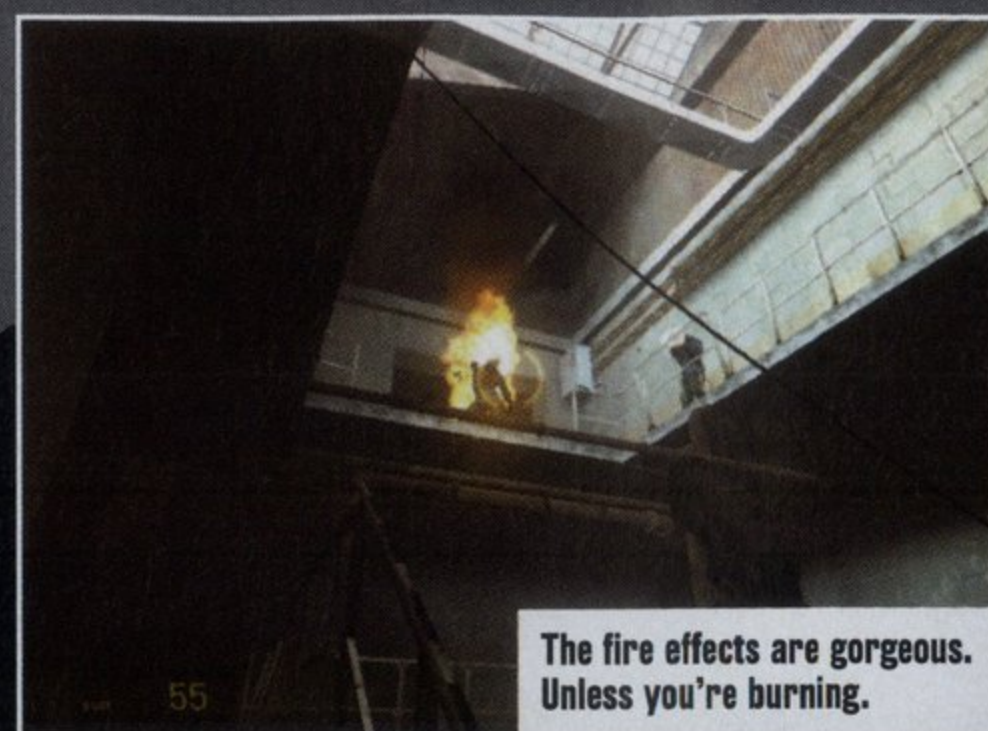
with a few new abilities. Now, if you shoot the poor soul the headcrab nests upon, yet miss the parasite, the head-crab will separate, and look for a new host: you. The zombies are relentless: we've seen them being sliced in half by a spinning blade, yet they dig their fingers into the ground and drag themselves towards you.

Even more questions are raised by Valve's admission that you'll be fighting alongside the Vortigons, the speckled-brown aliens that you unleashed in the original resonance cascade incident. They're not the only familiar characters to join your side. Barney, the much-loved, continually resurrected, doughnut-munching security guard from the original game is making a return, leading the resistance against

## "BARNEY IS MAKING A RETURN, LEADING THE RESISTANCE."

the Combine forces. He's lost some weight since then, and ditched his pistol for a far meaner brand of assault rifle. As well as Barney, Dr Kleiner is back: the sarcastic, heavy-rimmed-spectacle-wearing scientist seen briefly in the first game's introduction, along with Eli Vance, another former Black Mesa scientist, who lost his leg during the resonance cascade. Laidlaw has also dropped hints about an as yet unseen character: the Administrator. Referenced briefly in the *Half-Life* manual, the Administrator is not to be confused with the G-Man, who's seen watching, and perhaps even manipulating, your fate from afar. Excellently, all the original *Half-Life* voice actors will reprise their roles in *Half-Life 2*.

The biggest talking-point is a new character: Alyx, Eli's daughter. She's the first woman to make it into the *Half-Life* series (ever wondered why they needed ladies' toilets at Black Mesa?), and Laidlaw has made it clear that he's not ready to turn her into a damsel in



distress. She's blessed with a strong backstory: Alyx's mother was killed in the Black Mesa incident, and since then, she's learned to look after herself. She's accompanied by her pet robot 'DOG' (fanboy question: Why is Alyx's robot called Dog? Gabe Newell's answer: Alyx thought it was funny at the time), a lurching metallic beast that's been built and rebuilt a hundred times. Speculation rages across the web about the fate of Alyx: with certain sections of the fan community desperate for Valve to take the ultimate step and kill off one of their major characters, Alyx would be the obvious choice. But then Valve aren't known for following the obvious path. When *Half-Life 2* was first rumoured, there was some speculation that you'd be able to play as Alyx, along with Gordon Freeman. This isn't a new trick: Hideo Kojima played a huge joke on the fervent *Metal Gear Solid* fans by quietly substituting macho pin-up Solid Snake for the whining Raiden. We have a nagging feeling that Valve have something similar in store to surprise the utterly faithful *Half-Life* fans. The concept of further playable characters is hardly a novelty within the *Half-Life* series: each expansion pack played out the same events from differing perspectives.

However Valve decide to surprise us, thanks to the technology driving the game, the various characters understand their position and context in any given scene. They'll take a look around the environment and make meaningful decisions, putting two and two together. In an awesome demonstration of their effectiveness, Combine soldiers will work their way past any obstacles you put in their way, kicking down doors, knocking over tables and shattering glass, just to get a piece of you. These reactions aren't part of a set-piece: it's the result of tiny code-brains working out how best to gut you alive. This AI is a significant step up from the primitive yet convincing soldiers of the original game. Here's a fact that will surprise you: in *Half-Life* it was impossible for Valve to make their characters move and shoot at the same time. But it went unnoticed because the developers were clever

## THE HISTORY OF HALF-LIFE





## BUILD YOUR OWN HALF-LIFE

The next generation of *Half-Life* mod teams are eagerly awaiting the release of the *Half-Life 2* Software Development Kit. This comprises the tools and instruction manuals that allow amateur developers to rebuild the game in their own image. Valve have a very clear understanding of how *Half-Life* was further propelled by the mod community after the initial fuss died down. *Team Fortress Classic*, *Counter-Strike*, *Day of Defeat* and *Natural Selection*: all user-created mods, all brilliant, and all now Steam-powered.

Valve are now about to launch the latest version of the Software Development Kit, for use with *Half-Life 2*. Their plans are simple: to invite the modding world to Seattle, where they'll give a workshop to anyone willing to visit. From there, modding teams will be able to take away the SDK, and begin their work in advance of the *Half-Life 2* launch frenzy.

### HUBBLE BUBBLE

What are the surviving Black Mesa folk working on? Whatever it is, you'll need to kill it.

### VGUI

*Half-Life 2* contains its own Flash interface to animate computer screens.

### TEST CHAMBER

Chrome-dome here has been working to bring down the Combine forces.

### AFTER EFFECT

Post rendering effects allows this magnifying lens to distort the keyboard. Genius.

enough to hide the disability.

If you want a stunning example of how far the AI has advanced, take a look at the video on the DVD showing the Strider confronted by an obstacle – a suspended walkway. First the pilot attempts to blow the corridor away, bringing its under-slung weaponry to bear. When that proves unsuccessful, it drops to its haunches, and waddles underneath. Its response to attack is both hilarious and terrifying: it turns on the spot to eye the foe, then plunges a leg right through the unfortunate soldier.

You're able to see how – and why – characters react to the world via some beautiful animation. Valve have taken the long route to creating convincing characters without resorting to caricature, by taking advantage of pioneering research by Dr Paul Ekman, Professor of Psychology at the University of California Medical School. His work has mapped a

language of facial expressions: non-verbal communication that's recognisable in any culture. For instance, a shrug – a gesture that immediately bypasses the need to understand the Guatemalan for "err... dunno". That language has been translated into

## "TINY CODE-BRAINS WORKING OUT HOW BEST TO GUT YOU."

code and applied to every character within the game. Small details, like the way light reflects off teeth, and the shape and curve of an eyeball, are mapped and modelled. The skin of these characters isn't perfect; even tiny blemishes are added, to give personality to every face. The result: utterly convincing

directly to the players and keep the payment for themselves without having to share the profits with publishers, distributors and so on.

However, this new business model does have some potential disadvantages. Gamers may have to spend extra money to play the best mods. Plus, the financial reward may tempt mod teams to adopt safe formulas instead of focusing on experimentation and originality, which remains the chief contribution of the mod community.

**For more on the possibilities of Steam see page 32**

## TURN PAGE TO FOLLOW TIME LINE

JANUARY 2001

### DECEMBER, 2000

*Team Fortress 2* has yet to appear. To compensate, Valve release two fan-made mod projects. *Gunman Chronicles* is a rather average dino-hunter. The other mod is *Counter-Strike*, which overtakes *Team Fortress Classic* and *Opposing Force* multi-player to become the most popular online game.

### MID 2001

Rumours surface that Valve are working with psychologist Paul Ekman to create absolutely convincing videogame characters. Meanwhile, *Blue Shift*, an add-in originally created for the ill-fated Dreamcast version of *Half-Life*, is released to a mixed reception. It appears the world is growing impatient with Valve.

JANUARY 2002

### 22ND MARCH, 2002

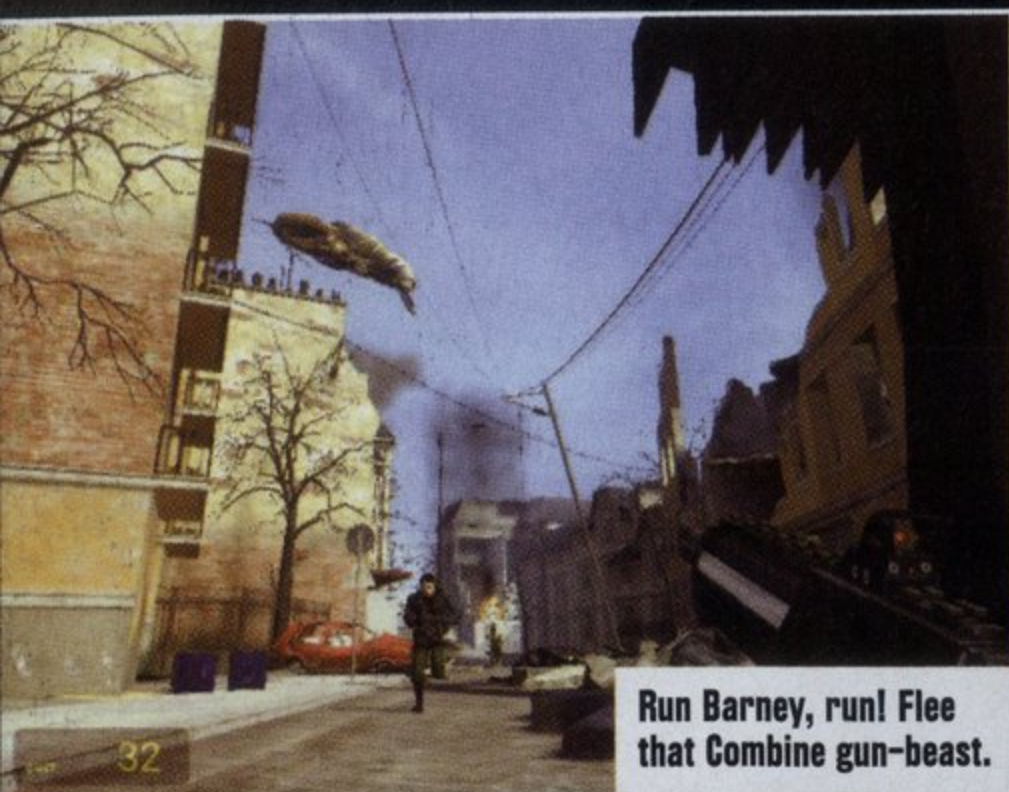
Valve formally announce *Steam*: a platform for delivering content to broadband subscribers, without the need for costly CDs, boxes, distribution and... err... publishers. Smart game analysts point out that for this to work, Valve will need something to sell. Hmm. What are they playing at?

### LATE 2002

It gradually becomes clear that Valve have stepped up production on the *Half-Life* sequel. Forum postings, leaked snippets of information, Chinese whispers and persistent no-comments all point to something genuinely special. We know something's happening. But what?



## Having a Barney



Run Barney, run! Flee that Combine gun-beast.



These Ant Lions are being cut down by automatic turrets. Ow.

► 'synthespians'. No longer will you be able to relieve your frustration by unloading two barrels of buckshot into a boffin; their pleading eyes and soft skin will be too beautiful to sully. We're also betting half of the *Half-Life 2* audience will admit to fancying Alyx. The other half will lie (or have healthy relationships).

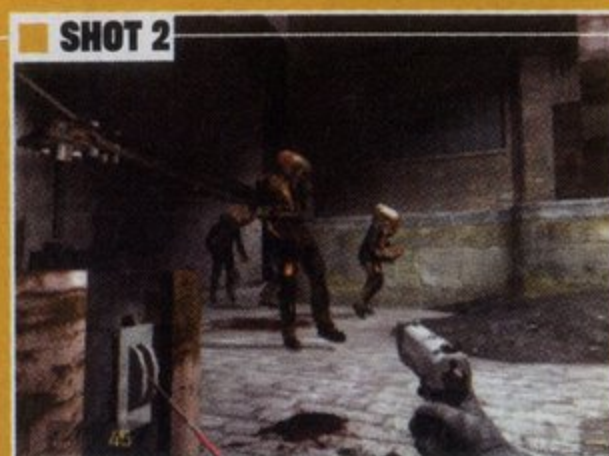
Technology allows game developers to explore new avenues. The Source engine is the technology behind *Half-Life 2*. It's the code that sits between the game design and your monitor. And Source, with its emphasis on creating believable, interesting, reactive environments, is the technology that will propel *Half-Life* into the stratosphere. Source renders the world in astonishing detail thanks to its support for the latest generation of pixel shaders (the same technology used to bring Sully's fur to life in *Monsters Inc.*), particle effects (the code behind steam, fire, noxious gases and resonance cascades) and bump mapping (the fine detail in bricks, wood and warts).

## SHAMBLES

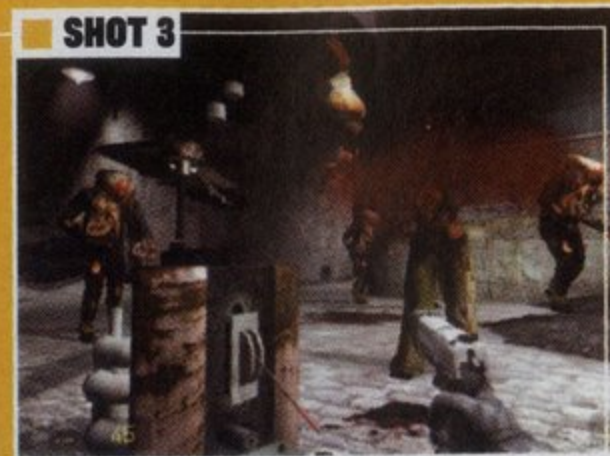
A step-by-step guide for taking down a whole platoon of shuffling zombie flesh-eaters. In *Half-Life 2* the scenery is as potent as any other weapon in your arsenal.



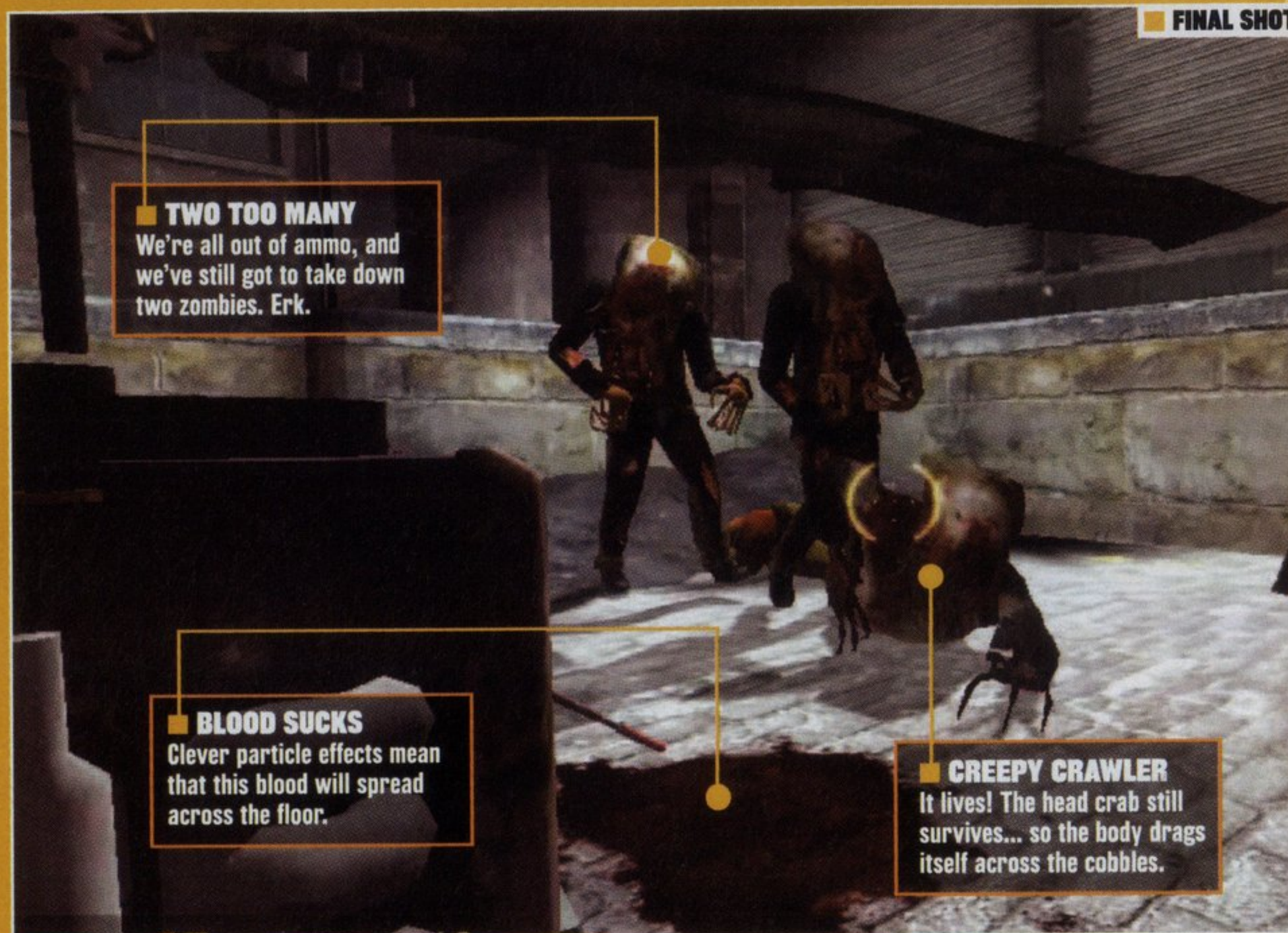
**SHOT 1**  
Hmm. A switch. Whatever can we do with this?



**SHOT 2**  
Uh-oh. Time to duck. The blades have started whirring and we're too close.



**SHOT 3**  
Ugh. That's not pleasant. Still. At least that's one zombie down...



**FINAL SHOT**

**TWO TOO MANY**  
We're all out of ammo, and we've still got to take down two zombies. Erk.

**BLOOD SUCKS**  
Clever particle effects mean that this blood will spread across the floor.

**CREEPY CRAWLER**  
It lives! The head crab still survives... so the body drags itself across the cobbles.

Meanwhile, under the hood, Valve have licensed the Havok physics code. Rather than animating each individual reaction within their game, Valve can turn the code on, and just let the game resolve the result on the fly. Every piece of incidental furniture has its own tiny brain. They don't need to instruct a plank that, when hit with a crowbar, it needs to move 38cm in a certain direction. The plank can work it out for itself. Havok is Isaac Newton, tied up in C++ ribbons.

Why invest so heavily in such technology? Because if it's done right, it means Valve can untether their scripted sequences, and let the game create its own situations. Scripted sequences are

present in *Half-Life 2*, but they're far looser, more open to play input. Gabe Newell has repeatedly stressed that he felt too many of their beautifully-directed storyboard moments were closed off from the player: out of necessity you saw them through windows, or caught the tail end, before a door slammed shut. That's changing. This time, Valve want to directly insert you into their most important moments. For instance: you're cornered by an Ant Lion, one of the hulking aliens. You're without weapons, and with no means to control the agitated beast, until a Combine APC draws near. The Ant Lion's reaction: charge the APC, bull-rushing it off a cliff top. You escape.

## THE HISTORY OF HALF-LIFE CONT...

MARCH 2003

### 16TH MARCH, 2003

UK magazine *Edge* goes on sale. The 'next month' page features the iconic crowbar, falling into the shape of a two. The internet immediately explodes. Scanned copies of the page are spread like wildfire – finally, the pent-up anticipation that has been building for five years is released.

### 10TH APRIL, 2003

The first real details emerge in a *PCGA* preview feature. We devote an astonishing 16 pages to the announcement. Gabe Newell firmly states that the game will be out, on the shelves, on 30th September, 2003: "We decided to do the whole 'when it's done' thing first." Can the game justify the words?

### 14TH MAY, 2003

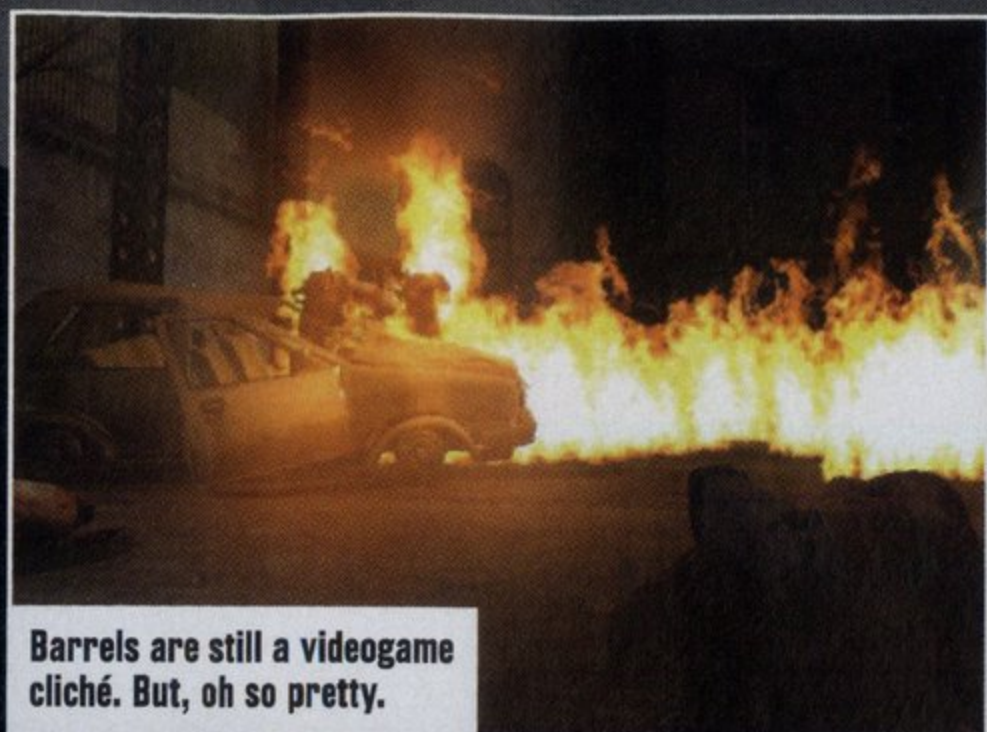
Gabe Newell presents *Half-Life 2* at E3 in a series of movie presentations. Journalists and industry insiders clamour for their first glimpse of *Half-Life 2* in motion. The videos are soon distributed across the web. This journalist puts off revision for his finals just so he can watch the trailers on repeat.

### 29TH JULY, 2003

The first sign of trouble: *Half-Life 2*'s publishers, Vivendi Universal, announce that *Half-Life 2* is not going to make its much-touted 30th September release date. Gabe Newell's curt response: "This is the first I've heard about the delay." The winter is spent enduring an agonising silence.

JANUARY 2004





Barrels are still a videogame cliché. But, oh so pretty.

The Source engine allows you to create organic solutions to puzzles: whereas previously cranes and forklifts have been fixed to straight-line channels, their control can now be turned entirely over to the player. Valve can provide you with a whole bunch of crates, barrels, and furniture: how you arrange it to build a path out of a trap is down to your own ingenuity.

This level of flexibility poses more than a few problems for Valve. Everything within the world needs to be programmed with characteristics: Gordon, for instance, weighs 85kg. Each surface must be dissected and considered, if the slightly odd world of *Far Cry* and *Max Payne* (where bodies slide almost imperceptibly down gradual slopes, and limbs become fixed in perpetual motion cycles) is to be avoided. Even the way sound is modified when reflected from a surface is

## "THE MOST EXCITING PIECE OF IN-GAME HARDWARE WE'VE EVER SEEN."

being modelled: corpses will slap against a highly polished tile floor, while creating a muffled thump when falling on carpet. Those sounds must be considered and recorded in detail before making it into the game.

The peak of Valve's technological innovation can be seen in what can only be described as the most exciting piece of in-game hardware we've ever come across: the manipulator gun. What few realise is that Valve have confirmed that there are in fact two types of 'physics weapons'. One gives you control over objects, flinging them sky- or Strider-wards, and can be upgraded throughout the game. The existence of the second manipulator gun emerged after October's code leak. The rumour is that this second physics gun allows you to join two or more objects together. Why bother with that? Because it's entirely possible to build walls from extraneous objects, or construct bull-bars for the front of your buggy.

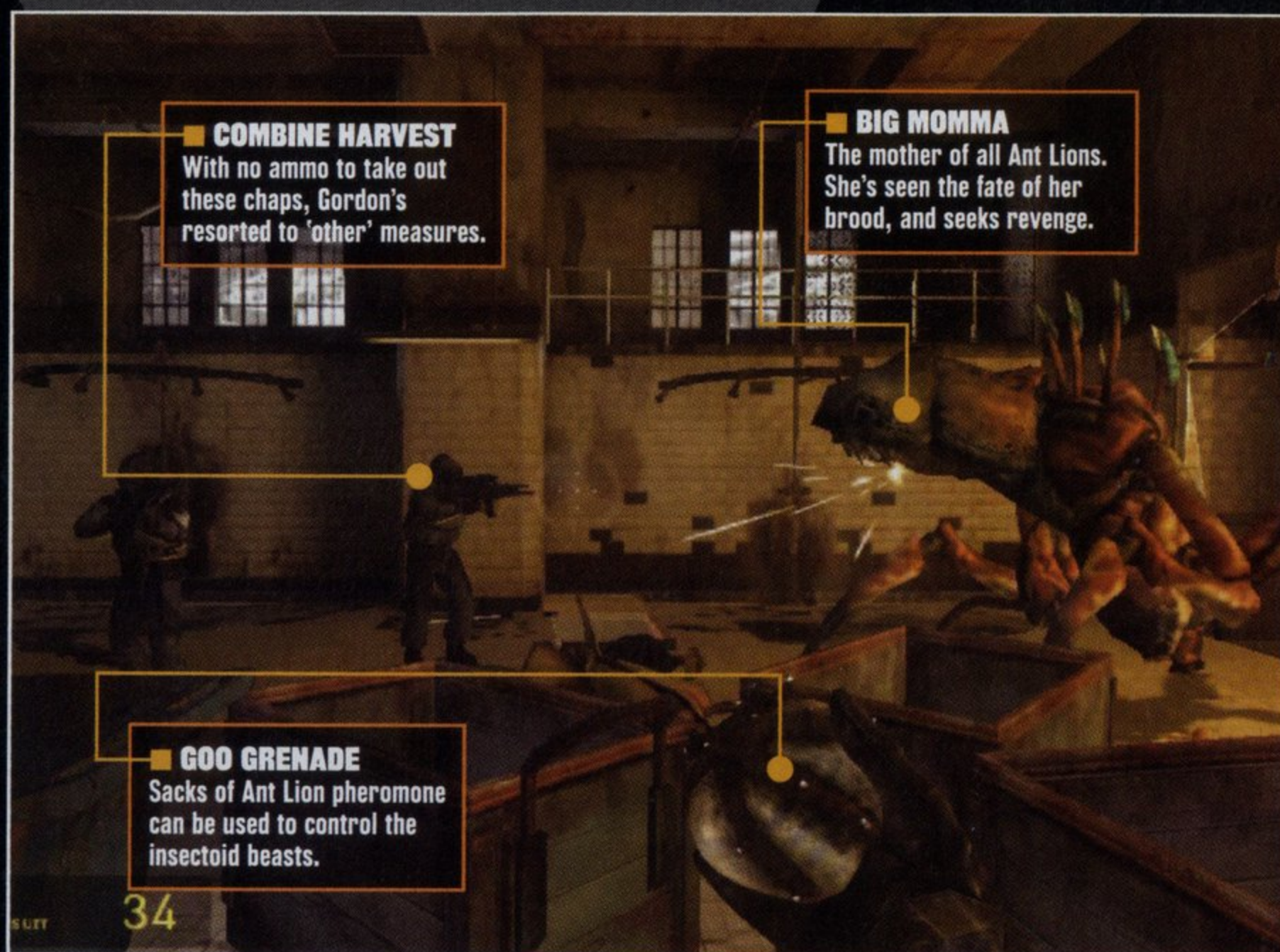
*Half-Life 2* has been in development since the day the original *Half-Life* was released. In a

## A MULTI-PLAYER MISSION

On the point of multi-player, Valve refuse to divulge any details. Rumours have surfaced that the included multi-player will be a version of *Team Fortress 2*, which has been in extended development since 2000. Credence was given to this when it was revealed that *Team Fortress 2* code was included within the stolen *Half-Life 2* source code. Newell has denied this on several occasions, so stop thinking in those terms. We're betting on something remarkably simple: a few simple Deathmatch or Capture the Flag maps, that just give the impetus needed for a second wave of mod makers to do the rest.



The original *Team Fortress* press shots. Could this have been a *Battlefield* beater?



**COMBINE HARVEST**  
With no ammo to take out these chaps, Gordon's resorted to 'other' measures.

**BIG MOMMA**  
The mother of all Ant Lions. She's seen the fate of her brood, and seeks revenge.

**GOO GRENADE**  
Sacks of Ant Lion pheromone can be used to control the insectoid beasts.

demonstration of astonishing self-belief, Valve have reinvested every penny they made from the enormous sales of *Half-Life*, *Opposing Force* and *Blue Shift*, *Counter-Strike* and *Day of Defeat* into *Half-Life 2*. Right now, that's about 40 million dollars. Work on the Source engine was begun only when the central tenets of the game were laid down, after extended discussion between Valve's level designers, artists, and storytellers. It's an engine uniquely suited to this game: it's been built to tell a story.

And that's what *Half-Life 2* is all about. The technology is nothing. What matters is that first moment, when the loading screen scrolls away, and suddenly, you're engrossed. Gordon's coming. Hold us.

## PART 2 - NEXT MONTH

Fresh screens • What it's like to play  
The word from Gabe Newell

### 11TH SEPTEMBER, 2003

The first benchmarks of the next generation of graphics cards are released, at an ATI 'shaders day'. Controversy reigns: Valve are accused of fixing the benchmarks in favour of ATI. Valve's claims are later demonstrated to be true, although nVidia promise their customers that they'll work with Valve to fix the problem.

### 23RD SEPTEMBER, 2003

Valve finally admits that *Half-Life 2* isn't going to be released on September 30th. Doug Lombardi, Valve's director of marketing, says "The previously announced September 30th release date for *Half-Life 2* is being pushed back. We are currently targeting a holiday release." Will it all be over by Christmas?

### 7TH OCTOBER, 2003

Rumours fly that a hacker has stolen the *Half-Life 2* source code from Valve's servers. Gabe confirms the story in a forum post: "Ever have one of those weeks? This has just not been the best couple of days for me or Valve. Yes, the source code that has been posted is the HL2 source code."

### SOMETIME IN 2004?

*Half-Life 2* is released, via Steam and game shops across the world. It becomes the fastest-selling PC game of all time. Valve earn the plaudits and respect they deserve, and a Nobel Peace Prize into the bargain. The world is unified and a new golden age of humanity begins. We await *Half-Life 3*...





# STEAM

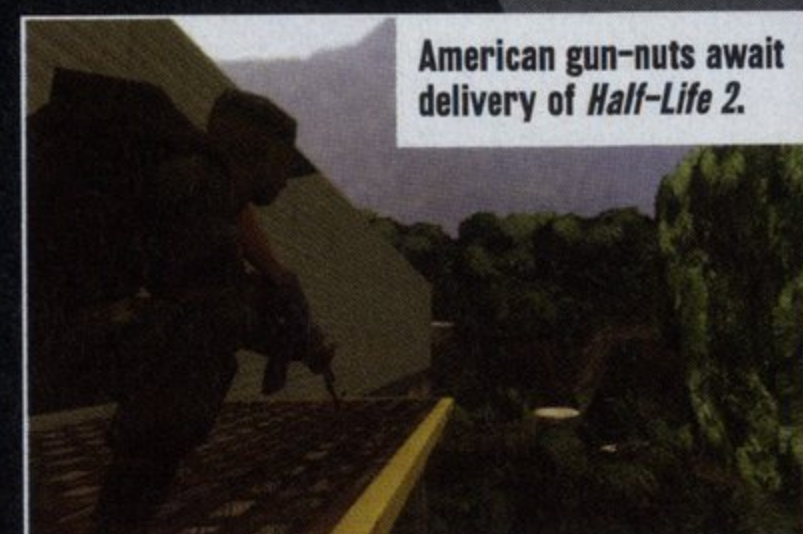
*Half-Life 2* anticipation reaches **boiling point.**



*Day of Defeat*: one of the best *Half-Life* mods available.



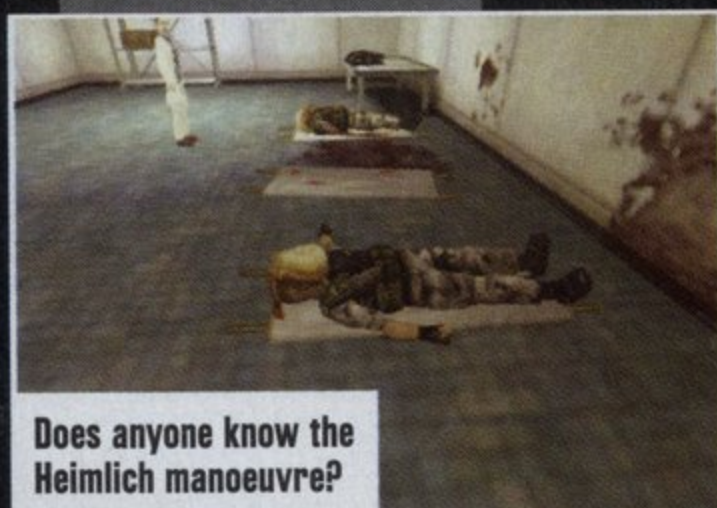
Downloading *DoD* through Steam is much easier than this.



American gun-nuts await delivery of *Half-Life 2*.

## GORD'S A FREEMAN

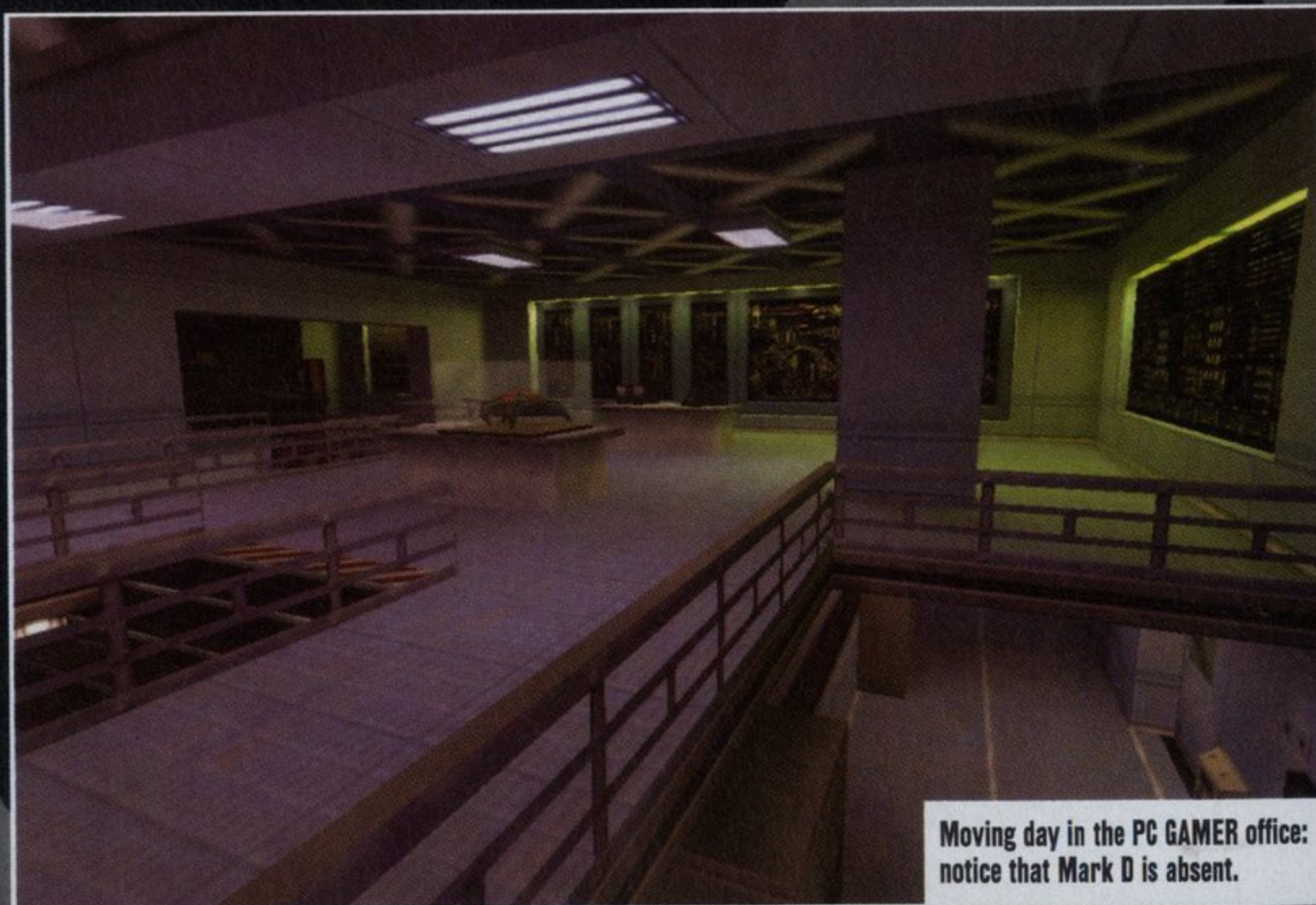
So just how will *Half-Life 2* work through Steam? As ever, the details are somewhat vague. We do know it'll be available online and at retail at the same time. That means that Valve will be pre-caching the game files onto Steam-users' hard drives. We'd figure that to get everyone up to scratch who pre-orders through Steam will take about a month of solid server sucking. Gabe's plans for the pricing system for the Steam model are interesting. You can lay out a single payment for the HL2, or you can buy a monthly subscription that will add content. Gabe expanded: "We're sure the \$9.95 guys are going to get better value, as we've been pretty good over the years at generating a lot of content."



Does anyone know the Heimlich manoeuvre?

**S**team is Valve Software's broadband-only content delivery system. Its true potential is staggering: it could re-define the way we play games, change the games themselves, and open up the market, freeing developers from publishers. If it works, that is.

The software itself is tiny, but it throws around a vast amount of data, currently downloading *Half-Life*, *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero* and *Counter-Strike 1.6*, *Opposing Force*, *Day of Defeat*, *Team Fortress Classic* and *Deathmatch Classic* onto your protesting hard drive. Accessing these requires a *Half-Life* CD Key – just one for all the games. Once the Steam pipe is open, every game receives automatic updates, where Valve trickle code into Steam's cache on your PC. If you have Steam running while you're online, the chances are it'll be updating one of the games in the games list in the background. The plan is to have a constantly updating game platform in place, spelling the end of the



Moving day in the PC GAMER office: notice that Mark D is absent.

phenomenon of downloading huge patches and updates which has become part and parcel of our gaming lives. The additional benefit of this constant updating

**"THE PLAN IS TO HAVE A CONSTANTLY UPDATING GAME PLATFORM IN PLACE..."**

is that, allied with specific anti-cheat systems, Steam-based games will have the advantage of being played on constantly re-written code, so that exploits become more difficult to implement and more swiftly redundant.

Security is a key issue, as Erik Johnson, project manager at Valve explained to us: "The Valve Anti Cheat system is constantly evolving with Steam, and we're continuing

to solve fundamental issues with cheating in our community. Steam makes it possible for us to make these changes much rapidly."

If you're simply interested in getting a new game installed onto your computer as soon as possible, the 'trickle' method of

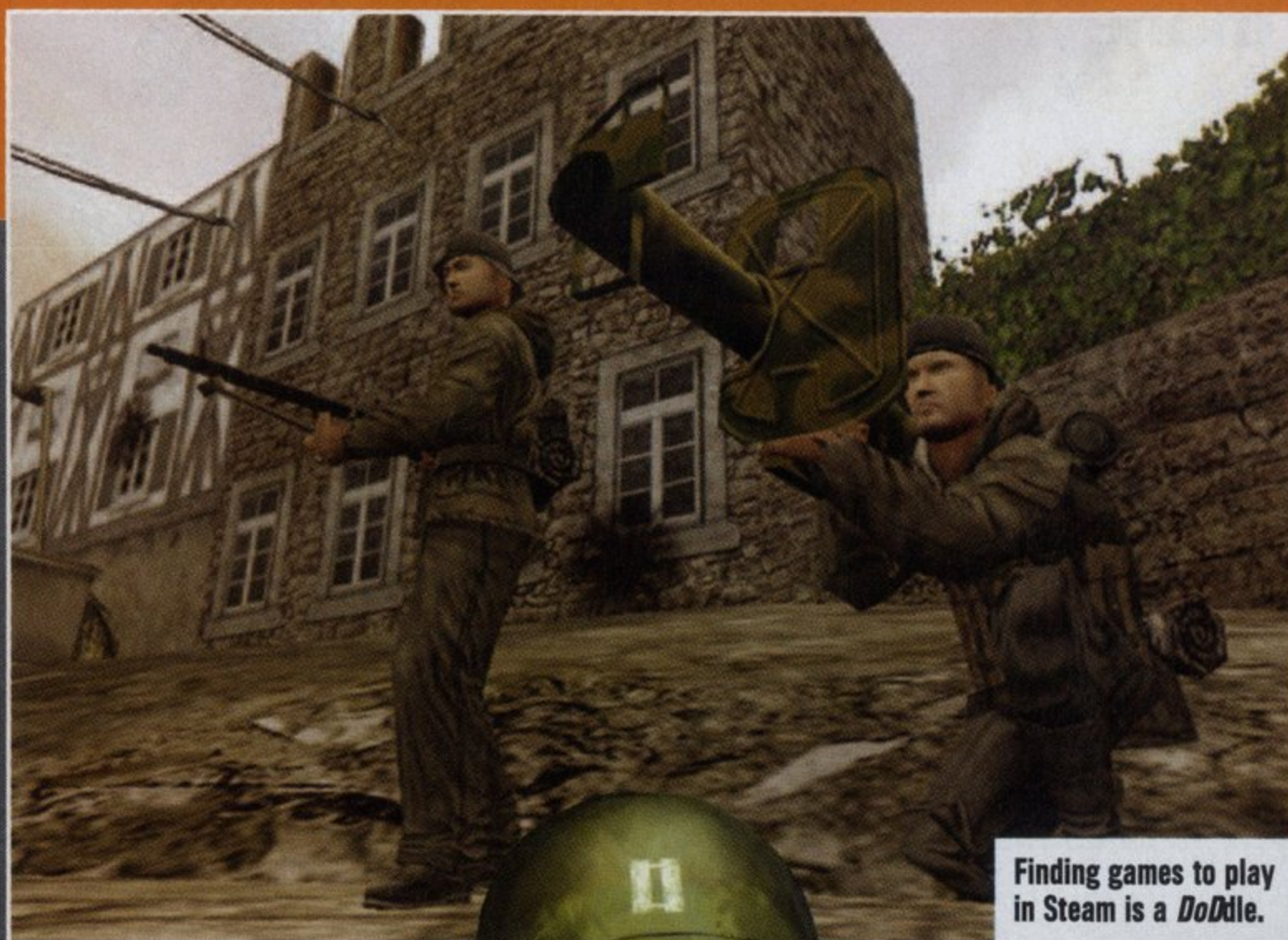


## STEAM MODS

Aside from the official Valve-sanctioned mods, there is a number of other *Half-Life* mods that currently work with Steam. We've been playing *Natural Selection*, the impressive aliens and marines RPG-based mod. It's well worth the download, and to save you the effort it's already available on PC GAMER's March 2004 DVD. Another Steam-compliant mod is *Hostile Intent*. Think *Counter-Strike*, but ultra-

slow and tactical. If you're looking for a complex terrorist-versus-counter-terrorist game, you can get this off our March 2004 DVD too.

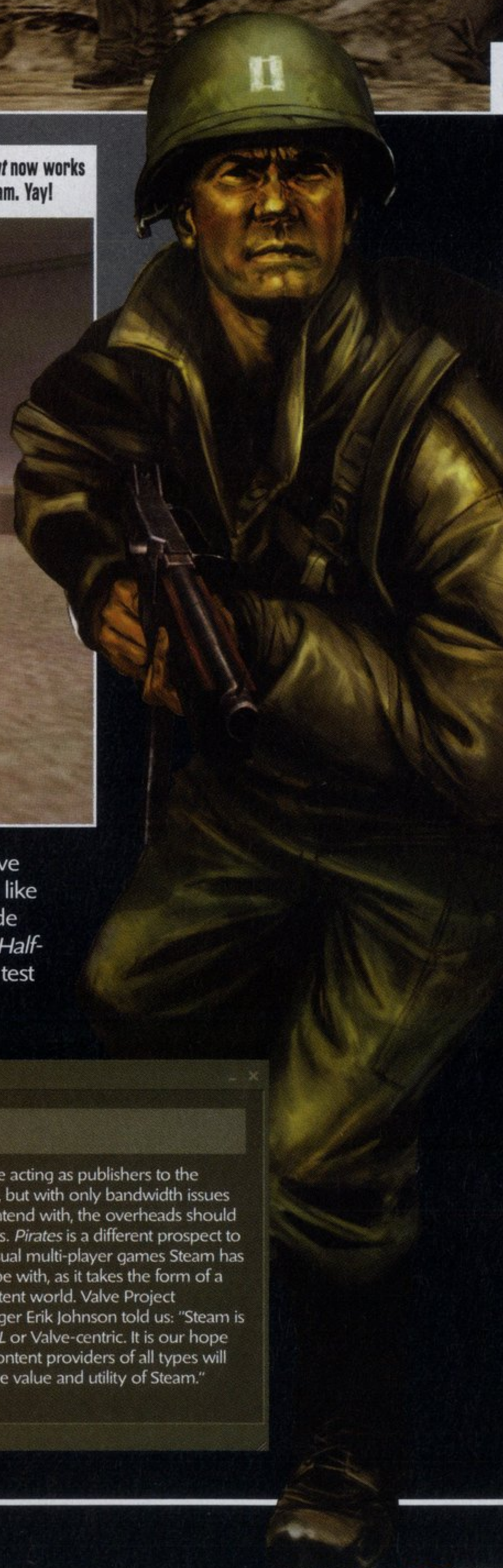
One of the most famous *Half-Life* mods, *Sven Co-op*, is also Steam compliant. It's a mod that lets you play both the original *Half-Life* and newly created missions co-operatively, and it's a brilliant piece of amateur game making.



Finding games to play in Steam is a *DoD*le.



*Hostile Intent* now works through Steam. Yay!



## THE SCIENCE BIT

The most intriguing Steam story to date is that Bram Cohen, the creator of peer-to-peer file-sharing software Bit-Torrent, has been signed up to work on Steam. There are certain similarities between the two programs: both allocate cache files the size of the download then fill the file with the relevant code. Bit-Torrent's principle is that as you're downloading, your machine is uploading content for other machines. Bram's expertise presumably means that Valve are either looking for someone who can optimise their current delivery model and who knows how to write code for shifting large numbers of data about, or that Steam may link your machine to a huge upload/download network. Quite frankly, we're most intrigued.

installing lets you pre-load the game files onto your hard drive weeks in advance of the actual release date. Once the date hits, Steam tells the game to turn on and you can play it right there, right then. Some gamers fear Valve might use this to install spyware on our PCs, but Erik assures us: "Steam is not designed to and does not install spyware under peoples noses." As we go to press, *Condition Zero* is being successfully bought and downloaded through Steam by thousands of gamers.

There's also a rather buggy buddy system being put in place: it's a proprietary Instant Messenger that lets you hook into any game your friends are currently playing. It even works in-game.

In its current state, Steam is an exciting piece of kit. Given the sheer load on the servers (it uses more bandwidth than Italy), the fact that it works at all is impressive.

Currently, bugs are popping up and Valve are hammering them back down again like an intense session of that comedy arcade game with the big rubber mallet. With *Half-Life 2* looming on the horizon, the true test is yet to come. ■

## FUTURAMA

Gabe Newell recently announced that Steam could be used to deliver prequel chapters of *Half-Life* and *Half-Life 2* to users. Prequels? The *Half-Life* phenomenon is getting bigger by the minute. We love it.

Another surprising release in the pipeline is *Pirates of the Burning Sea*, a piratical MMORPG. Valve are providing the delivery system for the game, but they have absolutely no other influence whatsoever. In essence,

they're acting as publishers to the game, but with only bandwidth issues to contend with, the overheads should be less. *Pirates* is a different prospect to the usual multi-player games Steam has to cope with, as it takes the form of a persistent world. Valve Project Manager Erik Johnson told us: "Steam is not *HL* or Valve-centric. It is our hope that content providers of all types will see the value and utility of Steam."



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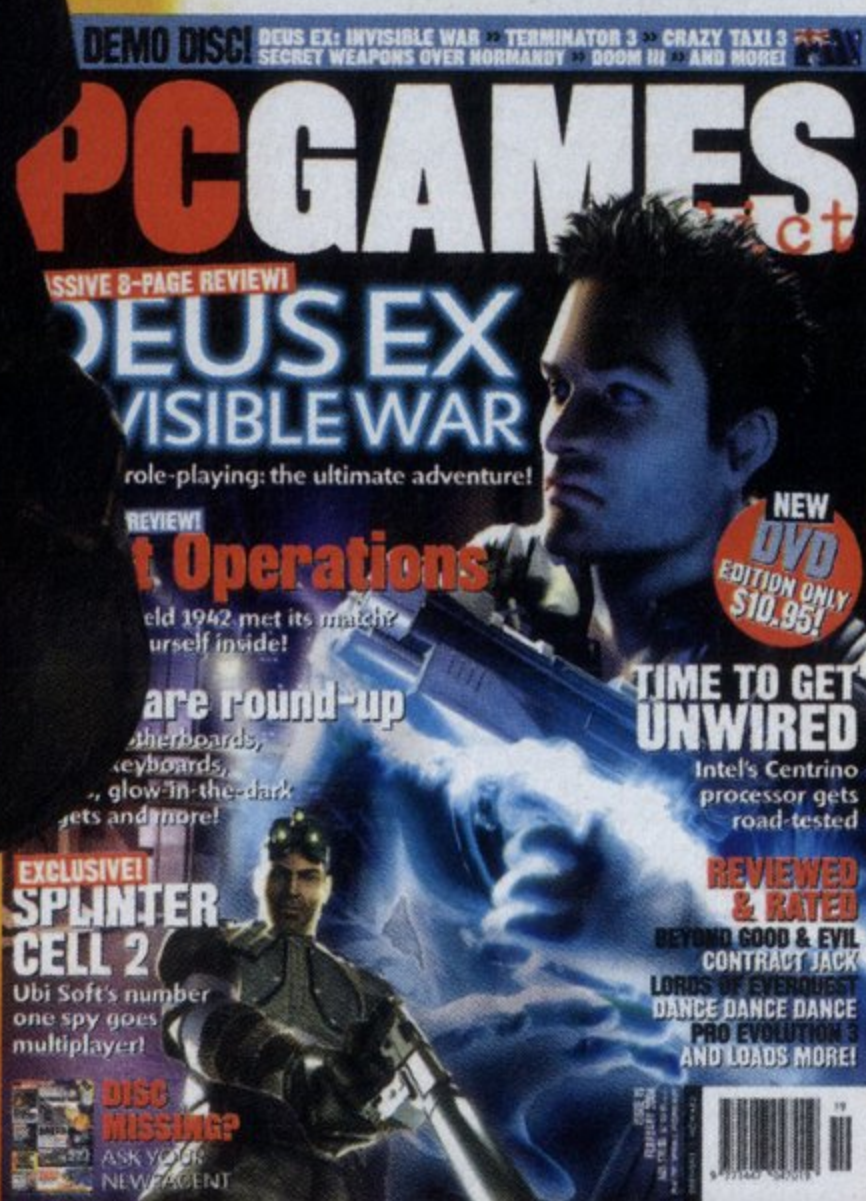
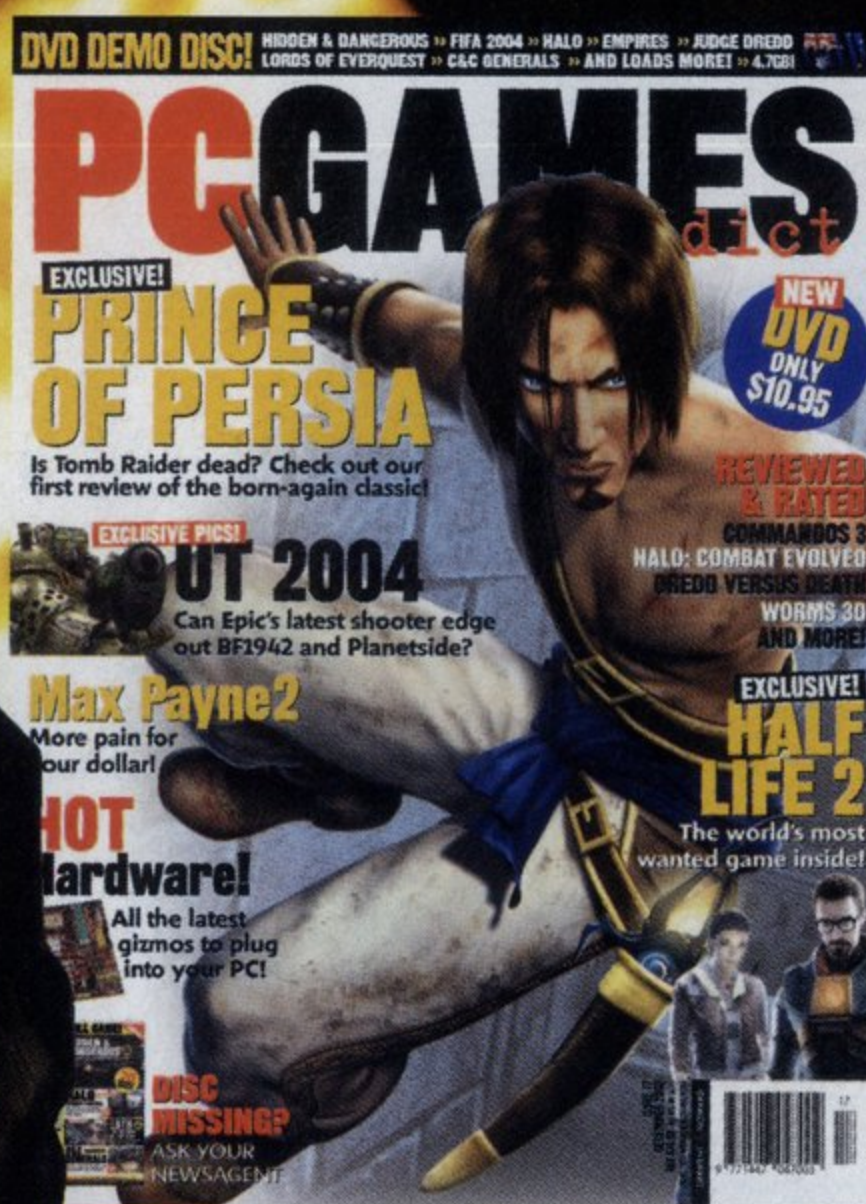
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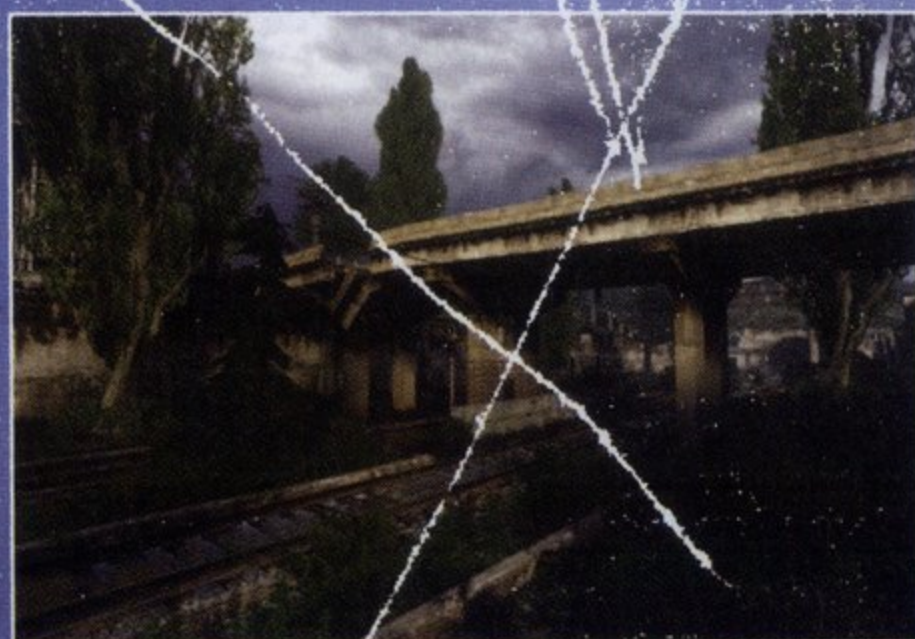
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# STALKER

## SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

We travel to Chernobyl to meet a mutant: the first of a new kind of first-person shooter.



In the front row of the demonstration room sits a journalist from a French PC magazine that shall remain anonymous. As soon as the put-upon PR stands up at the end of the presentation and asks, "Any questions?" he leaps into action.

"The man. The man in the demo. Why could you not save him?"

"What do you mean?"

"It is disgusting. The way you did not save the man. He is dead now. Because of you."

"Er. Yes. Um. What's the question?"

"I am absolutely disgusted. And the dolls. The dolls. Don't you understand that my children have dolls?"

"I don't..."

"That's it. I'm leaving." With that, he storms out of the theatre.

That's the problem with *Stalker*. It's an astonishing game: easily one of the top

RELEASE  
DATE  
SEPTEMBER  
2004

explains the increasingly unfriendly reaction from the rest of the gaming press. They just don't see. Yet.

*Stalker* is set sometime after a second 'incident' at Chernobyl. You play as one of many Stalkers, roaming the exclusion zone around the reactor, searching for artefacts: mystical trinkets formed in the fallout from the accident. Owning these grants special abilities and powers, and retrieving them from within the zone is a lucrative enterprise.

### "STALKER FEATURES THE BEST TEXTURE WORK IN ANY GAME WE'VE EVER SEEN."

five titles currently in development. When you listen to GSC talk about it, you just want sit back and marvel at their sheer, lunatic ambition. But then you pull away, and consider what they're saying. Can it really be possible? Are they capable of pulling this off? And isn't it just a teensy bit controversial? It's enough to provoke hostility, sometimes even anger. That

*Stalker* is unlike any first-person shooter you've ever played or imagined. The genre has previously been mostly about tight corridors and driving you ever onward. *Stalker* is the opposite: big skies, open landscapes, and an astonishing sense of place. It has more in common with a first-person massively multi-player game than with *Half-Life* or *Call of Duty*.

GSC have created a 30km square area for you to explore. It's a character in its own right – how you interact with it and its inhabitants informs the majority of your decisions within the game. Its vistas create an enormous sense of place: you don't just rush through this world, you explore it. Whenever GSC talk about their ideas, they always come back to this one point: the drama of *Stalker* goes on around you, you're just a bit player in a larger world.

It's a world modelled with astonishing attention to detail. *Stalker* features the best texture work in any game we've ever seen. Old telegraph wires rattle in the breeze, mortar has flaked away from the walls, unidentified lumps of twisted metal clutter the shadows. There's a sense of decay everywhere you look. This isn't a walk in the countryside: the zone is an area of industrial collapse, reclaimed by nature. It's partly inspired by GSC's own offices, located in Kiev's industrial heartland. A factory that once produced nuclear missile parts has become GSC's home and inspiration: some of the textures you'll see are lifted straight from its walls.

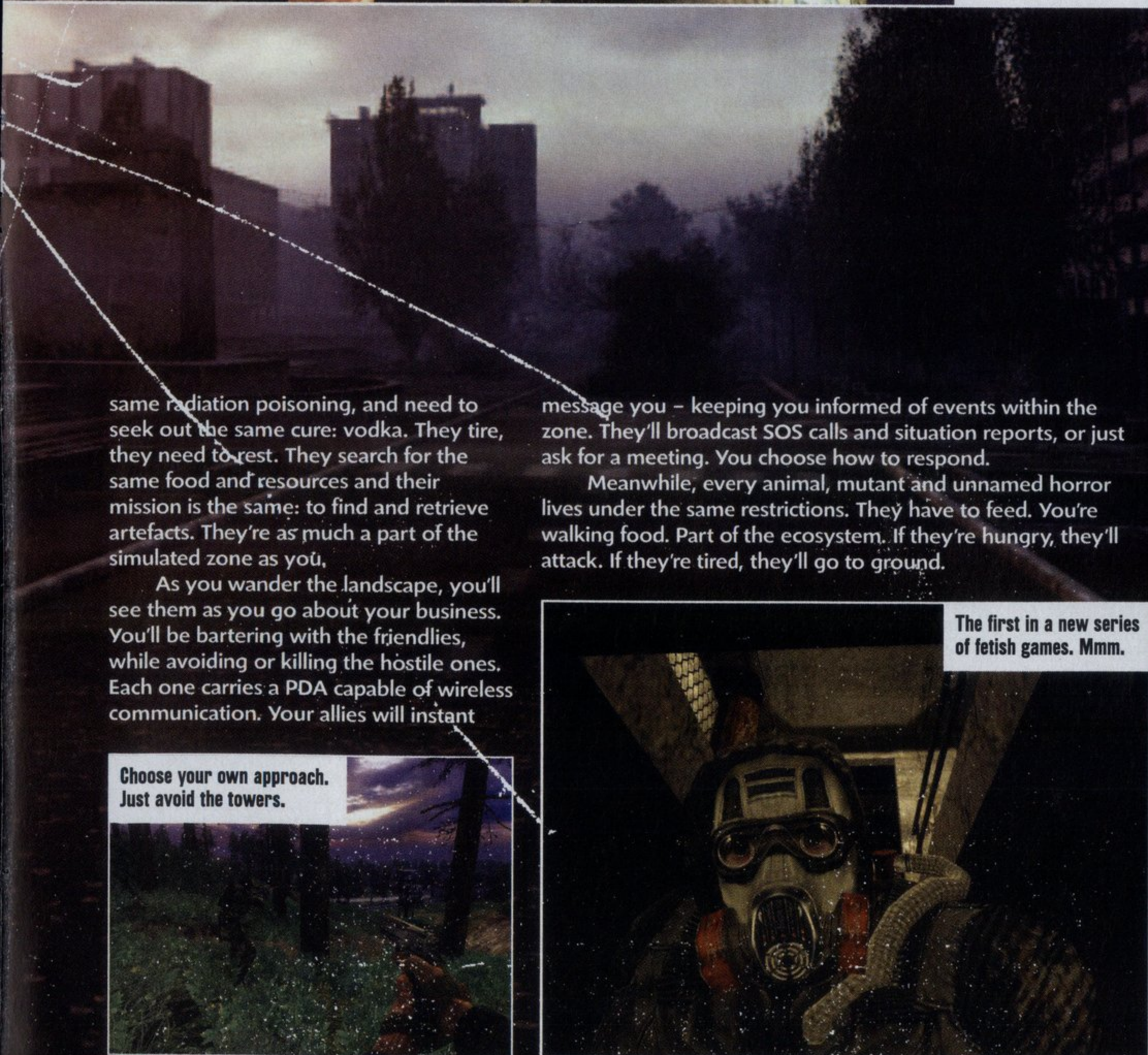
All developers love to talk about their AI. In most cases the details are meaningless, best relegated to the back of the box. *Stalker* is different. It has to be. Without genuinely interesting behaviour from the inhabitants of the zone, it simply wouldn't work. There wouldn't be a game, just an empty landscape.

Each AI Stalker, we are told, has his or her own needs and wants, just the same as your character. They suffer from the





In *Stalker*, even the trainspotters are hard.



same radiation poisoning, and need to seek out the same cure: vodka. They tire, they need to rest. They search for the same food and resources and their mission is the same: to find and retrieve artefacts. They're as much a part of the simulated zone as you.

As you wander the landscape, you'll see them as you go about your business. You'll be bartering with the friendlies, while avoiding or killing the hostile ones. Each one carries a PDA capable of wireless communication. Your allies will instant

message you – keeping you informed of events within the zone. They'll broadcast SOS calls and situation reports, or just ask for a meeting. You choose how to respond.

Meanwhile, every animal, mutant and unnamed horror lives under the same restrictions. They have to feed. You're walking food. Part of the ecosystem. If they're hungry, they'll attack. If they're tired, they'll go to ground.



The first in a new series of fetish games. Mmm.

## A Human Catastrophe



Alexander Novikov

The team behind *Stalker* have grown up under the shadow of Chernobyl: their offices in Kiev are little more than an hour's drive from the reactor. Much has already been written about their research trip to the exclusion zone, where they saw firsthand the results of the accident. Now it's our turn. We've been given a chance to visit the reactor, to see for ourselves how *Stalker* is commemorating the disaster.

Alexander Novikov was head of Nuclear Safety Systems at the time of the accident. He chooses his words carefully, avoiding direct questions about his work, instead talking about the human impact of the tragedy. He makes an impassioned speech about how little the rest of the world understands the impact of Chernobyl.

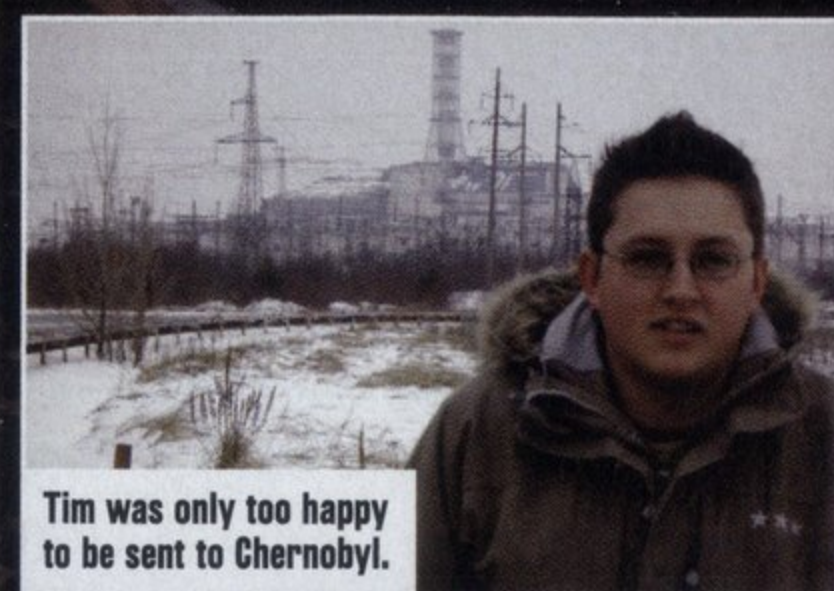
He saw it all from his office window. "Can you imagine how I felt, seeing that black hole on the white wall of my reactor?" The day after the accident, an army of buses and coaches was assembled, evacuating everyone from within a 30km radius. "My wife was in the coaches," says Alexander. "I spoke to her as she was leaving. Everyone was so scared." Chernobyl was a prestigious project: the workers housed in the purpose-built town of Pripyat. Celebrations of Soviet power were everywhere: from a Ferris wheel built for the children, to wrought-iron hammers and sickles bolted to the lampposts.



Compare this photo with the actual screenshot on the left.

Today, the town of Pripyat lies abandoned. It's cordoned off, a restricted area within a restricted area. As we wander around the town square, kicking up the snow, posing for photos, it's hard to not feel that we're trampling on ghosts, that the idea of basing a game around a genuine human catastrophe is tasteless. The team behind *Stalker* have rebuilt Pripyat within their game. The Ferris wheel is there, standing against the skyline. The old tenement blocks and stadium are there. You're able to wander freely, exploring the city, experiencing the devastation with the immediacy of first-person perspective. Alexander worries about this too. "I thought people would be upset by *Stalker*. I showed the screenshots to my wife, and I expected her to be angry. Instead, she just cried. 'What is the matter?' I asked. 'Finally, someone remembers us,' she replied."

Is it disrespectful to the many thousands of people affected by the disaster to make a videogame about it? It's the same question we asked of *Medal of Honour* and *Call of Duty* – before quietly returning to sniping at Nazis.



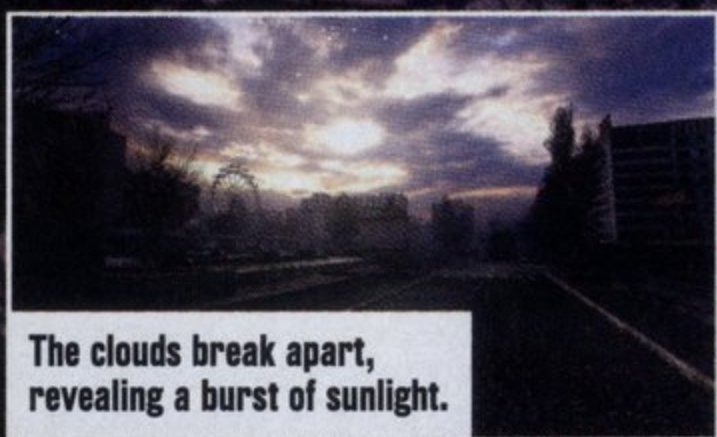
Tim was only too happy to be sent to Chernobyl.



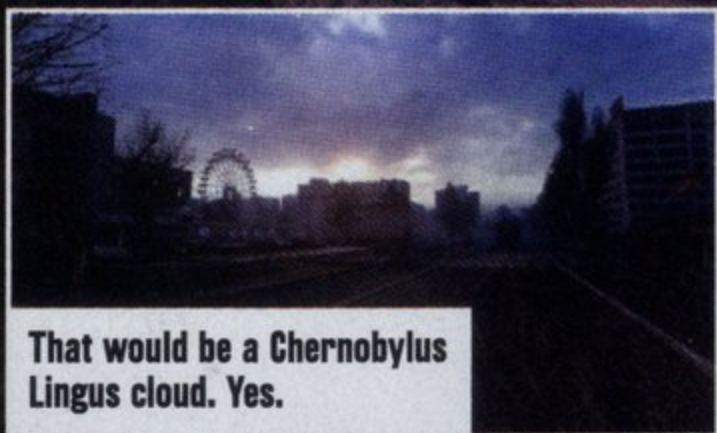


## Under a Steel Sky

The weather and time-of-day cycle within *Stalker* is just astonishing. Sunshine, storms and showers are beautifully blended together – you can watch the clouds gather, fronts moving in. Don't forget to pack your sou'wester.



The clouds break apart, revealing a burst of sunlight.



That would be a Chernobylus Lingus cloud. Yes.

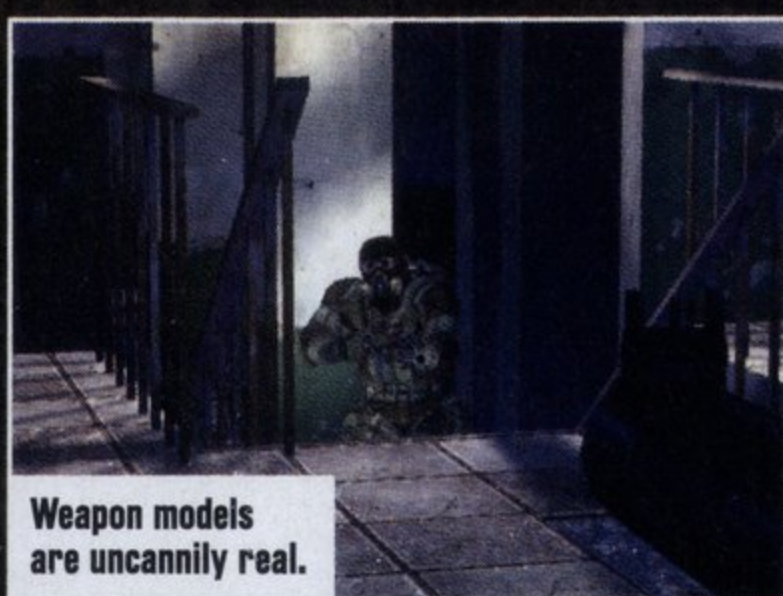
And if the Blowout is coming... It begins with a demonstration. Three Stalkers are sitting around a campfire, talking about something called the 'Blowout'. They're worried about it: they need to find shelter as soon as light comes. But there's a problem: you. GSC show the action from your eyes, as you creep towards them, flames flickering up into the sky. Before they even get a chance to detect your presence, they're taken down, quick-fire rounds.

Cutscene: a clapped-out Trabant picks up your character and carries him to a base. It's light now. You're talking on a

## "MUTANT DOGS ARE NOW IN THE PROCESS OF TEARING THE MEAT FROM HIS BONES."

radio. "The Blowout's coming soon. We need to find shelter."

What's the Blowout? According to Anton Bolshakov, *Stalker's* impossibly young project leader, it's an event that



Weapon models are uncannily real.



Maybe I'll take the lift.

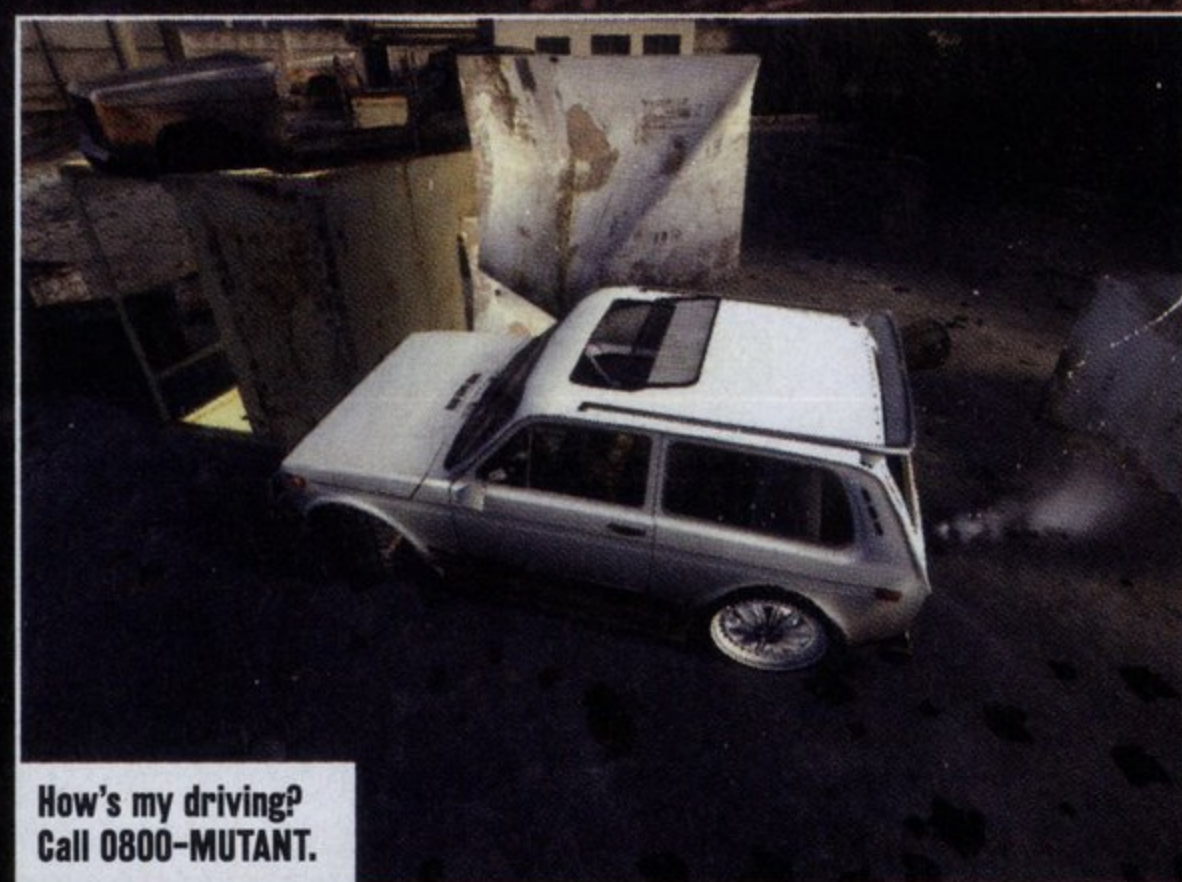


The rocket launcher has a rotten, rusty feel.

affects every living thing within the zone. "The player will learn that the Blowout is coming from the increased number of anomalies (see 'Anomalous Materials'). They will become worse, they'll see lots

of flashes of light, and they will hear thunderclaps. The Blowout itself is a deadly shockwave; if it catches you out, you'll be instantly fried. You have to take cover. All the creatures, and all the NPCs, will be trying to take cover from the Blowout as well. This Blowout changes the world. All the anomalies change their places, all the artefacts change their places. That makes for dramatic gameplay because now, the Blowout is causing everything to move."

Dramatic is the right word. The only cover in the vicinity lies across a bridge, which a team of Stalkers are defending for their lives against a river of mutants. They just keep coming. There are rats, dogs, boars and shambling sub-humans,



How's my driving? Call 0800-MUTANT.

pushing forward, trying to break through, invading the shelter. Then, the Stalkers fall back, shut the doors, and buckle down for the Blowout.

Another mission. This time, I'm in charge. The objective is to track down a solid mercury ball, currently in the hands of an opposing Stalker, known as 'The Dog'. His last known location is marked on the map – all I have to do is kill him, and loot the corpse. My approach is to scale a large cooling chimney, and snipe from above. Within seconds I've zeroed in, and ended his brief artificial life. After that it's just a case of looting his corpse and hiking to the artifact dealer.

Then, I try it again. This time, I decide to go in via a different route. I think I'm being clever, testing the game against its own PR, attempting to break it. When I arrive, sneaking around the back to pummel the enemy Stalker from behind, my jaw drops.

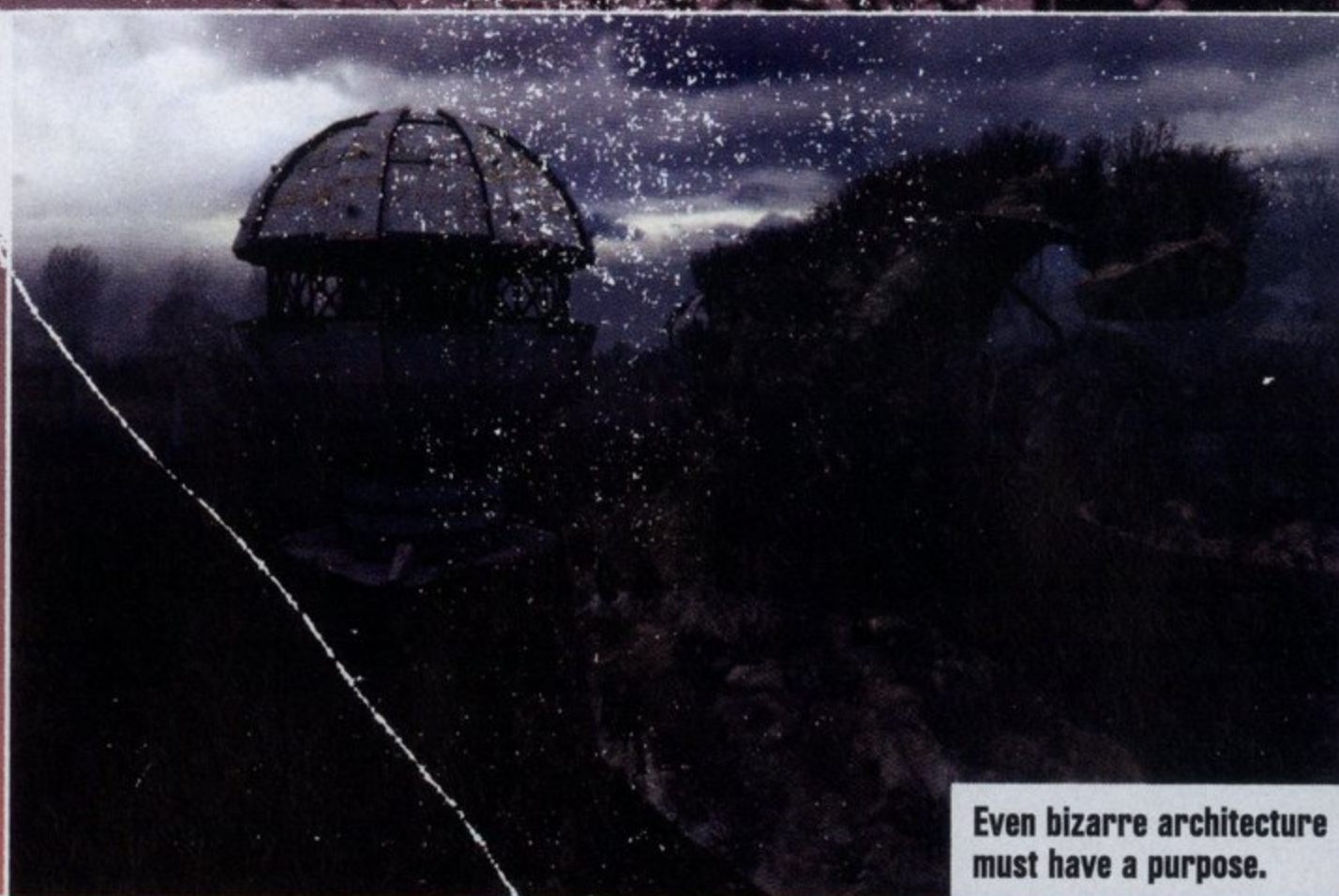
The Stalker is already dead. He's been savaged by a pack of mutant dogs, which are now in the process of tearing the meat from his bones. I open fire. They turn, take one look, and scamper off.

Third time. I've loaded up on grenades, restocked my ammo, I'm-ready for anything. I round the corner all guns blazing, shooting from the hip. But once again, the Stalker is

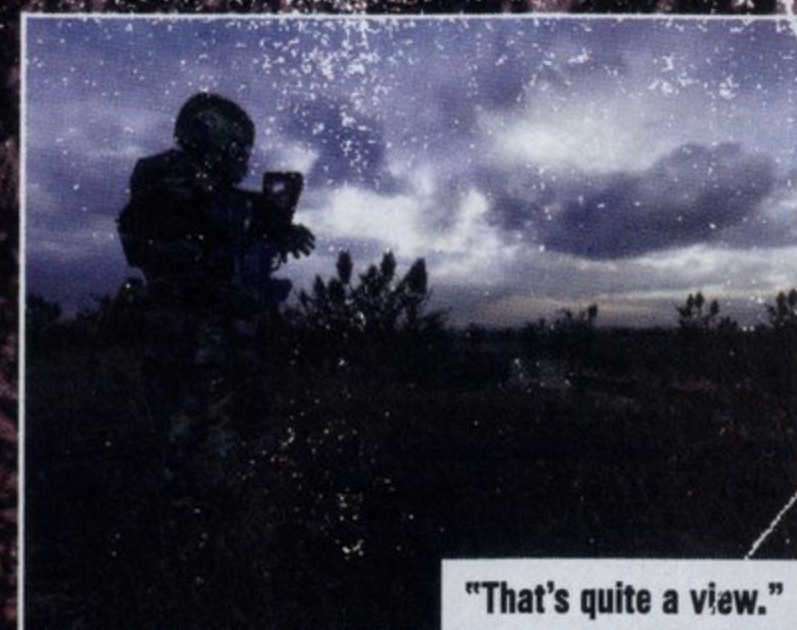


# Anomalous Materials

Dotted across the zone you'll come across patches of dead space where the laws of physics and reality don't apply. Expect gravitational strangeness, flashes of light and enormous special effects. You'll be able to detect these using a small Geiger counter device, and to mark their position you can throw bolts, nuts, any odd bit of metal lying around. When they pass through dead space, they fizz away. It serves as a warning: just imagine what that would do to flesh.



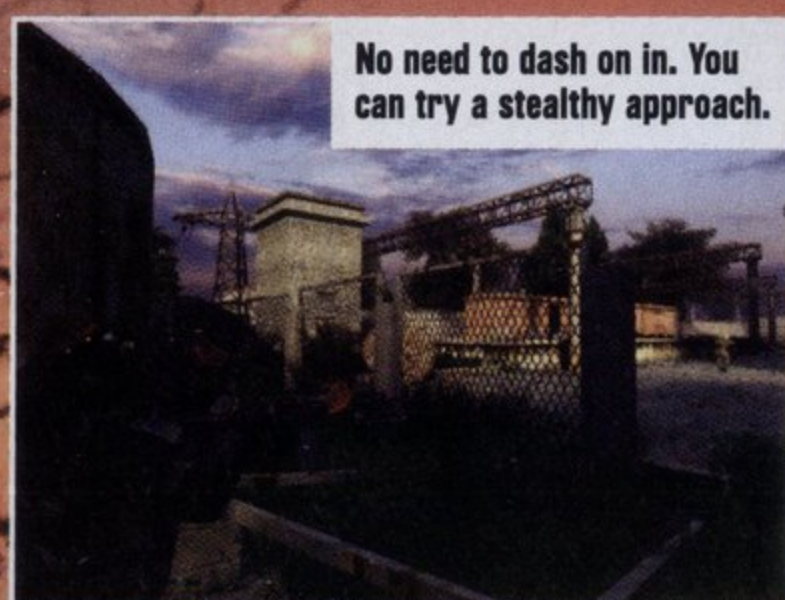
Even bizarre architecture must have a purpose.



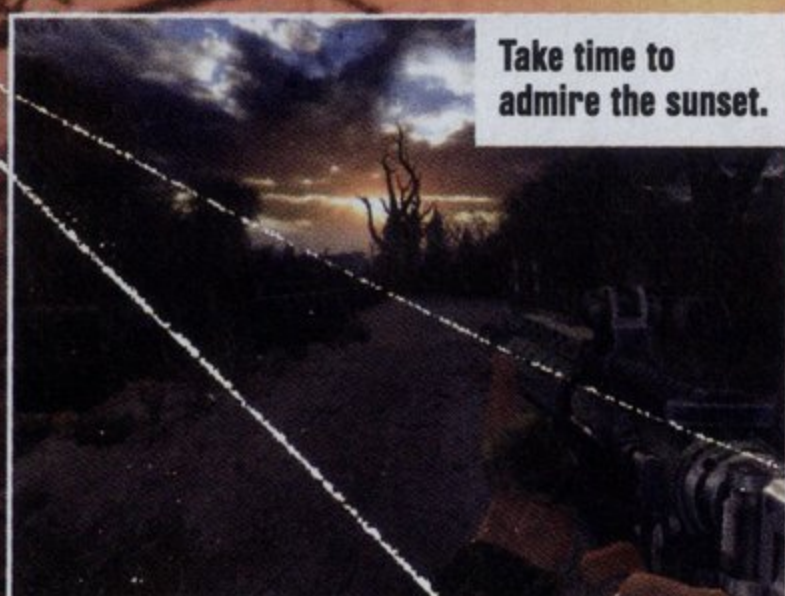
"That's quite a view."



The old Chernobyl rail facility, now abandoned.



No need to dash on in. You can try a stealthy approach.



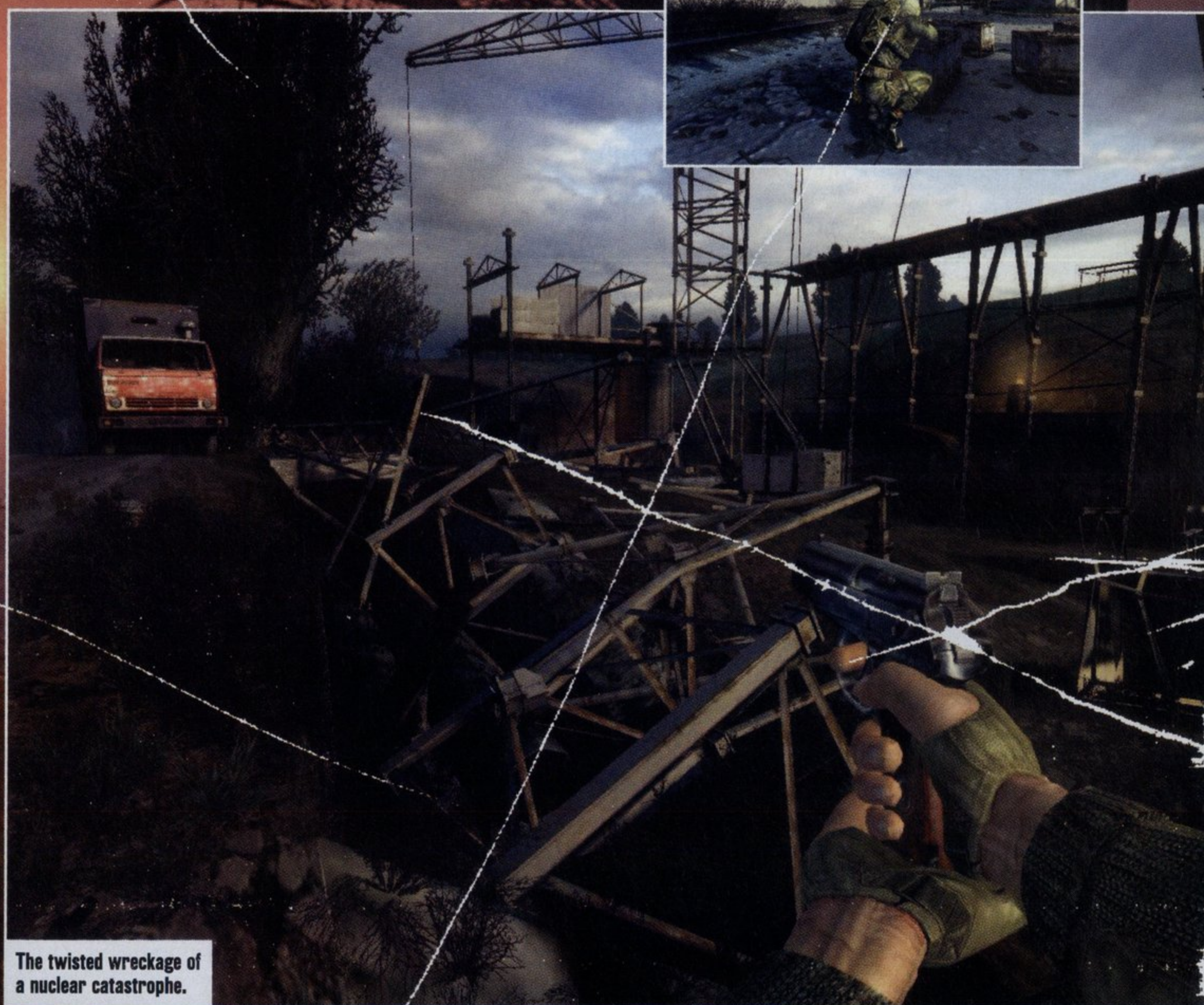
Take time to admire the sunset.

already dead. Just cresting a far-off hill is another Stalker, fleeing the scene of the crime. The mission has changed. Now I have to track this new disruption down. How irritating.

The hike to the artifact dealer highlights just how free and open this world really is. I spot a small wooden hut, suspended on stilts above a pond. I decide to take a look. A mutant boar is circling, foraging for food. Perhaps this isn't a good time to go off exploring. Besides, there's a job to be done.

As we approach the dealer, the sun goes down. It's almost imperceptible: first the light changes, from bright sunshine, to twilight. Then, the sun goes down, and you turn on the torch, peering through drizzle. A storm breaks, rain pelting against the plastic of my hood, solid footing turning to mulch. And then the realisation comes: it's dark, it's raining, I'm lonely and tired, and I'm not going to be able to find the dealer until sunrise.

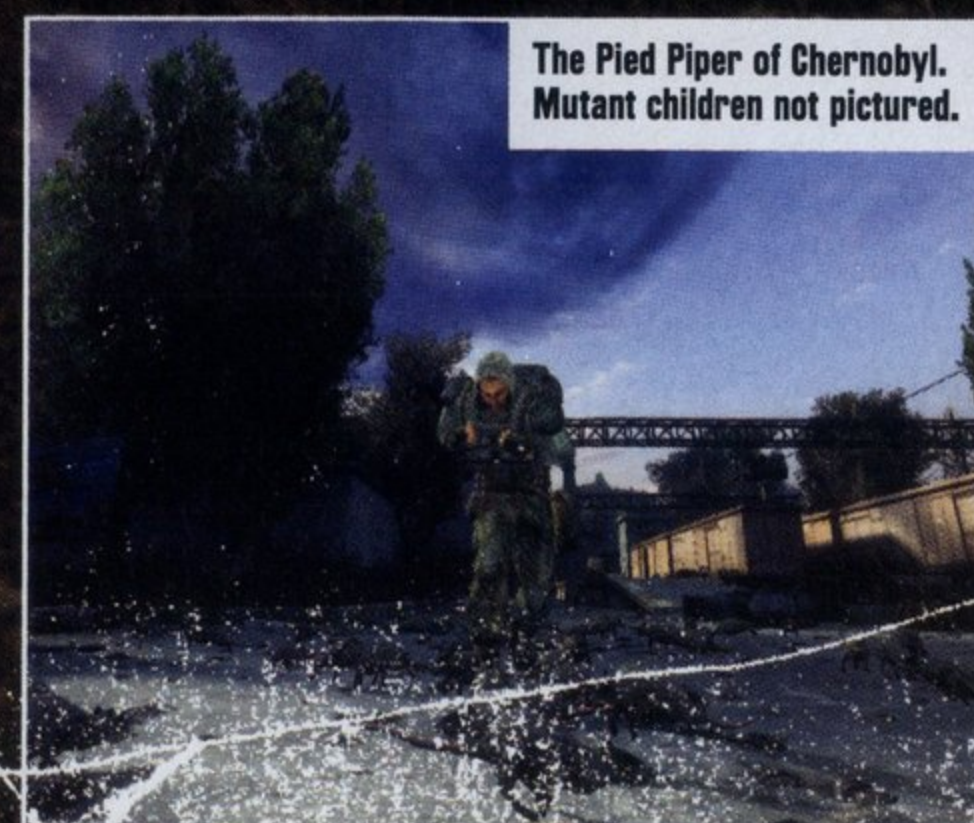
It's a rare game that can boast such a variety of experience. But *Stalker* is not merely a game about player choice. It's about setting, about character, and it's about being dropped into a derelict industrial playground 30km square.



The twisted wreckage of a nuclear catastrophe.



These textures are enough to make you weep.



The Pied Piper of Chernobyl. Mutant children not pictured.



MORE BANGS PER BUG

# STARSHIP

Right now it's riddled with bugs. If the developers work hard, the finished game will have even more. **By CHRIS BUXTON**

**BUGS.** First, there are about ten or twenty. Scary, but nothing too hard to handle. Then, from over the horizon, a few more appear. But this time they don't stop coming. More and more pour over the hills, down the valley and towards the isolated outpost. A grenade is thrown. Insect legs and torsos fly skywards in the resulting explosion. There are over a hundred bugs now – a huge fire-breathing tanker bug among them – and still they come, charging at the walls, clambering over their fallen forerunners, overwhelming the outpost by sheer weight of numbers. It's a breathtaking sight, an impressive technical achievement. Yes, it's that scene from *Starship Troopers*. But this isn't the movie, this is the tech demo for the new game inspired by the film. Would you like to know more?

We've been here before. Twice before, to be precise, for *Starship Troopers* has been the subject of two previous PC efforts, only one of which anybody got to play. The first was a Microprose project way back in 1997, hard on the film's theatrical release. It was a Mech game, drawing on the powered suits of Robert Heinlein's original novel, but was canned midway through development and

never saw the light of day. Its replacement, released at the end of 2000, once Hasbro had absorbed the Microprose brand, was a routine, squad-based RTS. It went some way towards capturing the look and feel of the movie but ultimately proved frustrating to control. Can it be third time lucky for *Starship Troopers*?

Empire clearly think so, and the main reason for the company's optimism is that aforementioned insect-filled tech demo, developed by their in-house studio, Strangelite. The level has some 128 warrior bugs – and one tanker bug – scurrying around the film's Whiskey outpost location, with Strangelite vowing that the final version of this level will have between three and four hundred of the critters. That, and the fact that a new *Starship Troopers* movie arrives this summer, goes a long way to explaining why Empire were happy to bag what initially seems a dated licence.

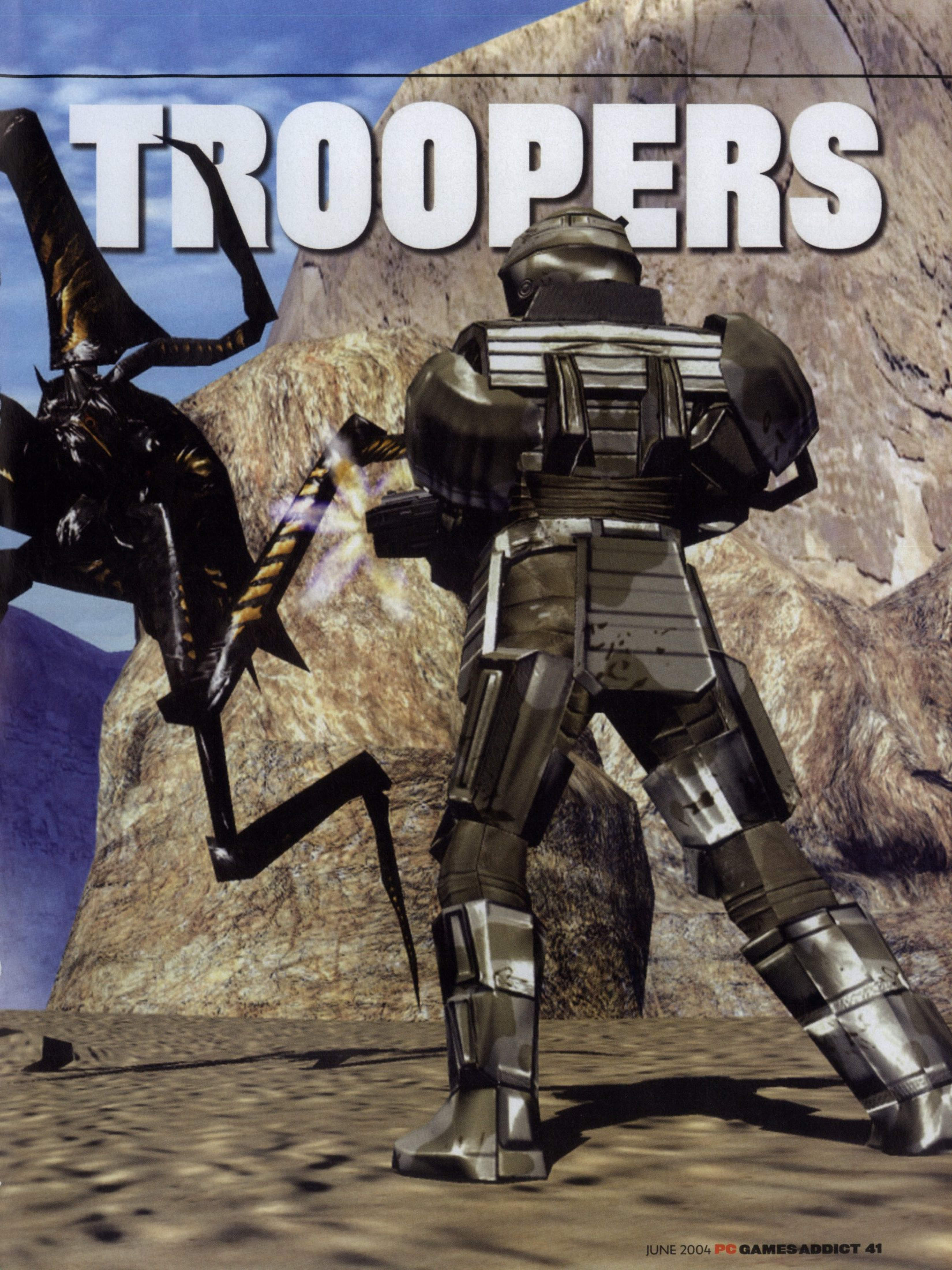
Some may have had trouble with the tone of the film – Heinlein's tale of man versus the Arachnids skewed as a pitch black satire on man's militarist and fascist tendencies. But none could argue that the action it delivered was superb, both comically vicious and visually stunning. And what's the best, well, what's just about the only way to deliver said brand of action to the PC? Not surprisingly Strangelite have opted for a first-person

**"No FPS has tried to serve up this many foes since *Serious Sam* and *Doom*."**

*"Would you like to know more?"*



# TROOPERS







**"Ordinary warriors, gigantic tanker bugs, flying hoppers, brain bugs..."**

Either a troop carrier, or those flying bugs have evolved some scary new armour.

## THE LIGHT FANTASTIC

Strangelite opted to build their own engine from scratch for *Starship Troopers*, partly because it would allow them to tailor it to their own, unique requirements for huge numbers of models on screen at once. But the chance to create a full, real-time lighting model also appealed. "It's like the kind of lighting that you



can do in a film," explains senior programmer Doug Binks. "You can really achieve that cinematic style, where you can place the lights wherever you want to achieve the kind of look you want. Plus, some of the actual gameplay dynamics are based upon it, mainly in terms of creating that fear aspect that you wouldn't get in a classical game because you wouldn't be able to do real-time lighting." Strangelite have also decided to try out a system in which the player character's eyes adjust to different light levels. "When you're outside in the bright sunshine and you look inside, it's pretty dark," says Binks, "but as you go in, your in-game vision will adjust somewhat."

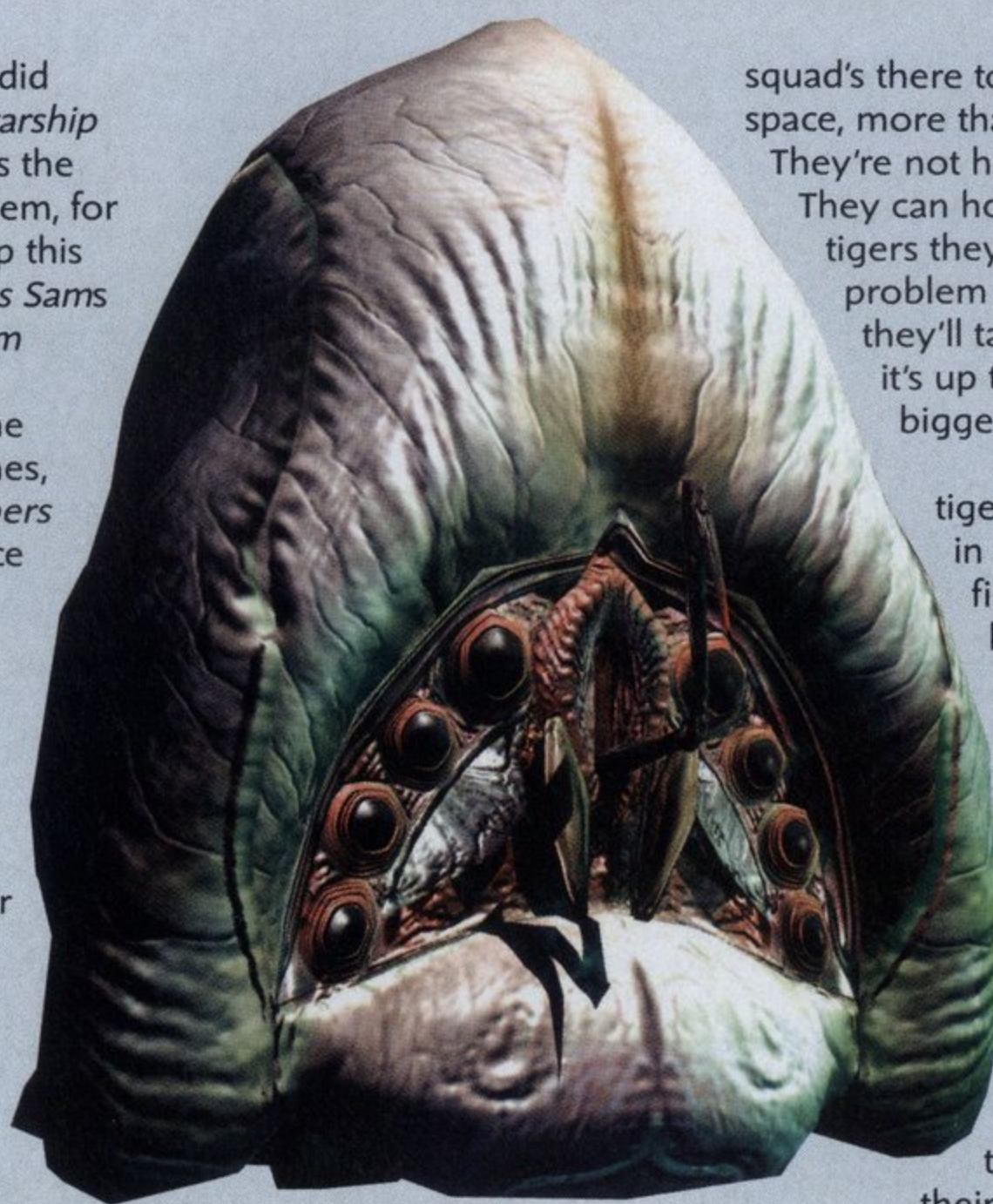






shooter, although this idea did escape the two previous *Starship Troopers*. Or perhaps it was the technology that escaped them, for no FPS has tried to serve up this many foes since the *Serious Sams* and, much earlier, the *Doom* series of games.

"Yeah, they're about the closest," agrees Richard Jones, designer on *Starship Troopers* at Strangelite, "the difference being that in *Serious Sam* you spent most of your time backtracking away from this mass of things. In *Starship Troopers*, you've got your squad with you – and in the bigger battle sequences you'll have other squads too – the bugs aren't all focussed on you." And although you do fight with squads, the onus is on your character, as Jones explains. "Your



squad's there to give you a breathing space, more than anything else.

They're not heroes themselves.

They can hold the warriors back, tigers they may have a bit of a problem with but eventually they'll take them down, but it's up to you to take the bigger guys down."

OK, warriors and tigers? An explanation is in order. Just as in the film, *Starship Troopers* has several distinct species of bugs performing different tasks within the Arachnid forces. Familiar from the movie will be the ordinary warriors, the gigantic tanker bugs, flying

hoppers, brain bugs and those thingies that fire plasma from their abdomens. Wonderful thing, nature. But augmenting these are new bugs, some adapted from the animated series, some designed especially for the game, all with the purpose of giving the Arachnids a more flexible fighting force and giving us gamers a welcome bit of variety.

The most immediate are the eye-catching evolutions to the basic warrior class, the main Arachnid in the movie. Apart from the entry level warrior, there are now tougher, meaner variants. Distinguishable by natty stripes and bolstered by armour on his legs, the aforementioned tiger won't just charge straight at you, all mandibles blazing. According to senior programmer, Dr Doug Binks, "He's a more free-roaming, intelligent beast; the tactical, special ops kind of guy." Further up the evolutionary scale is the royal warrior, blessed with more spiky weapons and better armour, then, finally, the imperial warrior. "He's a heavyweight dude," says Binks, "used mainly to protect the most important areas of the hive – nest areas, the queen's lair, brain bugs – and whilst he's not a boss, you'll need to work at him to beat him."

Other bugs perform unique functions in the Arachnid army, such as rhino bugs which act as battering rams, pounding an opening in the human front line. "It's actually based on the rhino beetle," says lead artist, Andy McCann, his small work space lined with concept sketches of the game's insects. "It's a nasty little bleeder with great big horn on the front, but we've gone with a three-pronged effect because it didn't look alien enough."

Finding the need for a projectile-firing foe amid all the melee

"Would you like to know more?"







## MORE BANGS PER BUG

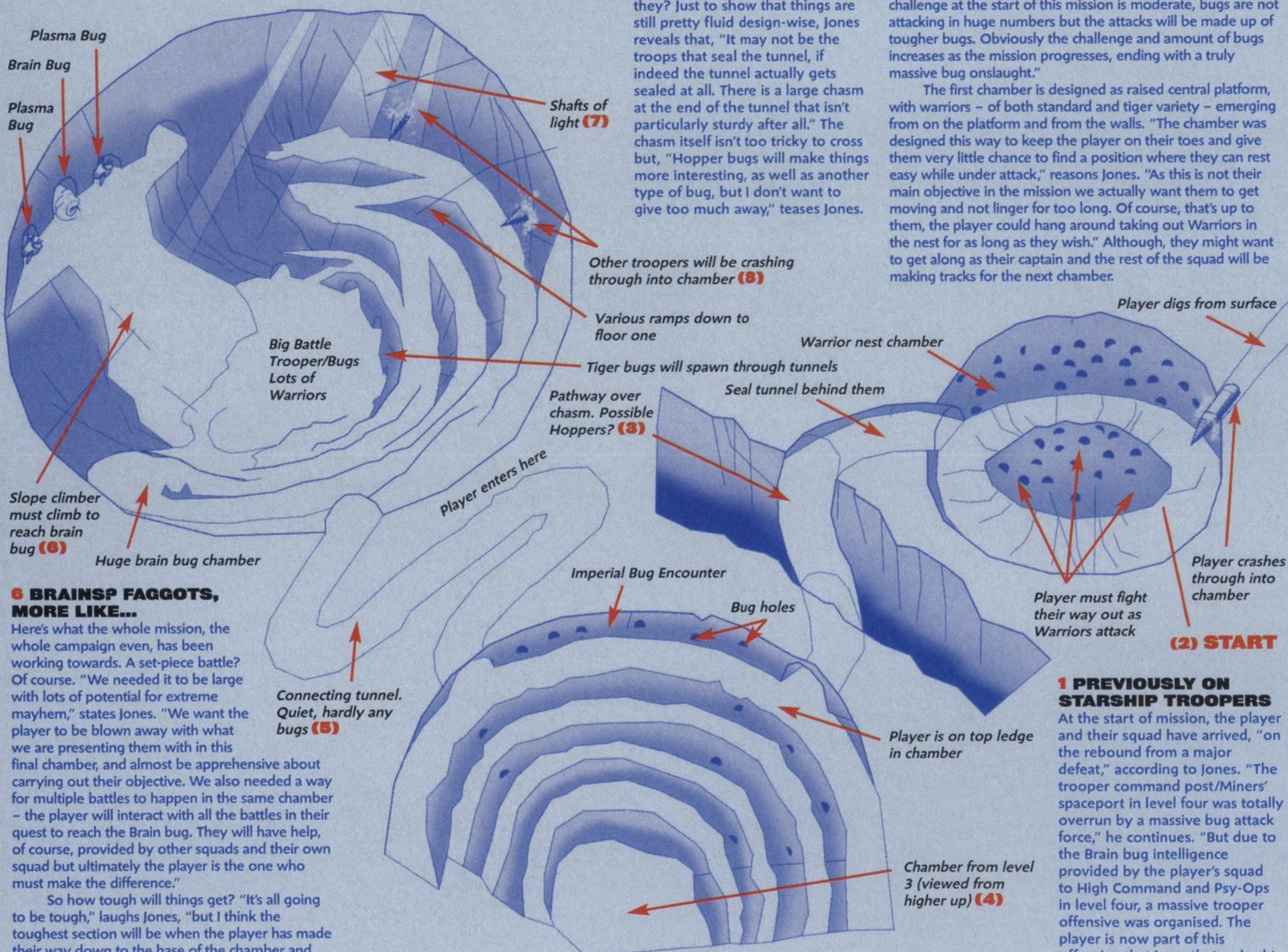
**MISSION FIVE** is the climax of the first campaign and is inspired by the final underground sequences of the movie, where a brain bug is discovered. Here, the humans struggle through a nest of warriors, across a chasm patrolled by hoppers. They must defeat imperial bugs guarding the approach to the brain and then fight through a mass of bugs, all the while bombarded by plasma bugs. Sounds simple in theory. In practice, it'll be a lot more difficult, as designer Richard Jones explains by revealing some of the design decisions behind the creation of this particular mission.

### 7 SURFACE TENSION

See those shafts of light? That's daylight coming through cracks in the top of the chamber. Jones explains the significance: "This chamber is close to the surface because it acts as a staging area for the bugs before they are sent on an offensive above ground. The Brain bug is actually addressing the bugs in preparation for such an offensive as you enter the chamber."

### 8 CRASHING THE PARTY

The bugs are actually unaware of your presence when you first enter the level. Enter one "hapless fleet pilot," as Jones puts it, and all hell proceeds to break loose. "The other troopers actually trigger the battle to begin in earnest and help to keep the bugs occupied from there on in." As for precisely how the other troopers arrive, Jones is enigmatic. "Let's just say they make their entrance with a certain style and flair... ahem."



### 6 BRAINSP FAGGOTS, MORE LIKE...

Here's what the whole mission, the whole campaign even, has been working towards. A set-piece battle? Of course. "We needed it to be large with lots of potential for extreme mayhem," states Jones. "We want the player to be blown away with what we are presenting them with in this final chamber, and almost be apprehensive about carrying out their objective. We also needed a way for multiple battles to happen in the same chamber – the player will interact with all the battles in their quest to reach the Brain bug. They will have help, of course, provided by other squads and their own squad but ultimately the player is the one who must make the difference."

So how tough will things get? "It's all going to be tough," laughs Jones, "but I think the toughest section will be when the player has made their way down to the base of the chamber and has to battle through the masses of bugs that are down there." The fight to kill the Brain bug will also be challenging but because of the big blob himself. "The Brain bug wouldn't be that hard to beat if it travelled alone, although like any important figure it has bodyguards that protect its interests." (You see, I'm not alone in this – Ed)

And that's that. Brain bug eliminated, more dead bugs in your wake than a school playground in cicada season. An all too brief respite will follow. "After the encounter with the Brain bug the need to push on will become clearer to the player. Really, the first campaign will be just a taster of what's to come."

### 5 QUIET. TOO QUIET

The map says, 'Connecting tunnel,' and reassuringly describes it as, 'Quiet.' This must be the calm before the storm. "That's exactly what it is," agrees Jones. "After the bug encounter in the previous chamber the player will deserve a rest before the massive undertaking that is the Brain bug chamber."

## LEVEL CONSTRUCTION



Plastered across one wall of designer Richard Jones' office are 15 A3 pencil sketches, each detailing the rough look, the layout and the flow of the action of an entire mission of *Starship Troopers*. From these sketches, more schematic colour versions are produced, giving the whole team a plan to work from. Not only do these blueprints provide a fascinating insight into the design

process, they also look – with apologies to Strangelite – refreshingly similar to those lovingly crafted scribbles that many of us, your humble correspondent included, spent hours on every evening after school, as we "created" our own game. A game that was, I might add, criminally overlooked in *Crash* magazine's Design A Game competition. Not that I'm bitter. Oh no.

### 3 (FALLING) DOWN TIME

The first chamber over with, the troopers seal the tunnel behind them, as it says on the map. Or do they? Just to show that things are still pretty fluid design-wise, Jones reveals that, "It may not be the troops that seal the tunnel, if indeed the tunnel actually gets sealed at all. There is a large chasm at the end of the tunnel that isn't particularly sturdy after all." The chasm itself isn't too tricky to cross but, "Hopper bugs will make things more interesting, as well as another type of bug, but I don't want to give too much away," teases Jones.

### 2 START AT THE BEGINNING

As it's the last mission of the first campaign, things are heating up. "The player is really starting to get a feel for the sheer amount of bugs they have to encounter," explains Jones. "The challenge at the start of this mission is moderate, bugs are not attacking in huge numbers but the attacks will be made up of tougher bugs. Obviously the challenge and amount of bugs increases as the mission progresses, ending with a truly massive bug onslaught."

The first chamber is designed as raised central platform, with warriors – of both standard and tiger variety – emerging from on the platform and from the walls. "The chamber was designed this way to keep the player on their toes and give them very little chance to find a position where they can rest easy while under attack," reasons Jones. "As this is not their main objective in the mission we actually want them to get moving and not linger for too long. Of course, that's up to them, the player could hang around taking out Warriors in the nest for as long as they wish." Although, they might want to get along as their captain and the rest of the squad will be making tracks for the next chamber.

### 1 PREVIOUSLY ON STARSHIP TROOPERS

At the start of mission, the player and their squad have arrived, "on the rebound from a major defeat," according to Jones. "The trooper command post/Miners' spaceport in level four was totally overrun by a massive bug attack force," he continues. "But due to the Brain bug intelligence provided by the player's squad to High Command and Psy-Ops in level four, a massive trooper offensive was organised. The player is now part of this offensive that is partly 'payback' for level four, and partly a critical mission objective for campaign one overall."

### 4 UP THE JUNCTION

Players will have already seen this chamber in an earlier mission – the first time they catch sight of a brain bug – and its shape was partly influenced by Rome's Coliseum. "It's kind of a junction for bugs," says Jones. "Lots of different routes converge in this chamber, in the third mission the whole chamber comes alive with activity in an instant."

With its many ledges and bug holes, it's not a good place to lose your footing. "The player may be able to fall down to a ledge below the one they are on and survive because the distance is not that great," explains Jones. "There will be multiple routes back up to the top ledge, although the player may not want to go back to the top ledge in a hurry as it turns out." However, if the player falls from the very top ledge of the huge, 100m high chamber, they'll lose all their energy and die.



## SIZE MATTERS

It's all very well looking at a schematic map on a page, but how big will it all seem to the trooper in the street, er, tunnel? Jones goes into estate agent mode: "Each of the three chamber's increases in size in the order the player encounters them. To give an indication of the size, the last chamber (Brain bug chamber) is around 130 metres from the ground to the roof, 100m wide and around 200m long. It would take around four minutes for the player to walk from the first chamber to the end of the last if, of course, they were unobstructed, which obviously isn't the case. Times and sizes are subject to change, but we want the last chamber to be as big as possible as it houses a huge battle."

## BIGGER AND BUGGIER

The whole mission is structured as a constant escalation of the amount of bugs the player faces but it's not all kill, kill, kill. "In between each encounter the player will have a certain amount of 'down time' just really so we can build up the tension and fear of what's around the next corner," says Jones. "Because you're not fighting humans in *Starship Troopers* we have to use both surprise and suspense," he continues. "The amount of bugs that have long range attack capabilities is small, so we have to use as many methods as we can to intrigue the player."

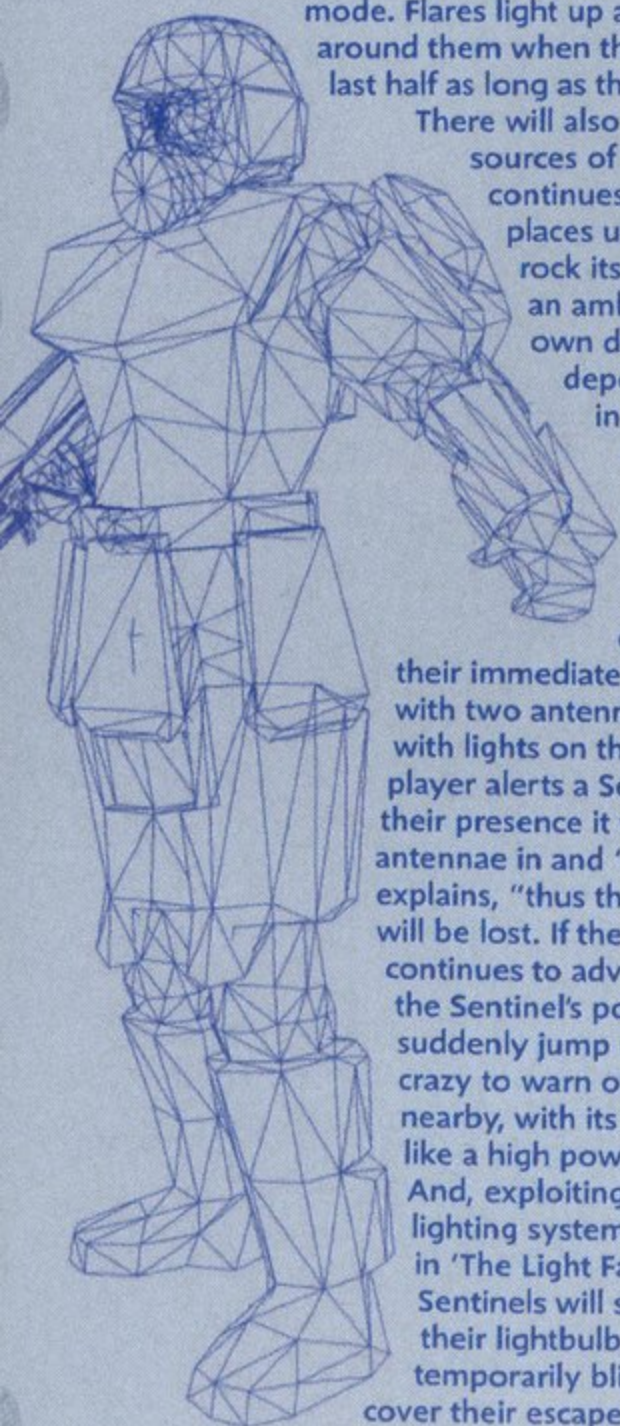
## DON'T BE AFRAID OF THE DARK

As this is a mission set in a complex of underground tunnels and caves, Strangelite want light to play an important part. "Or should I say the lack of light," teases Jones. "Getting a negative emotion from the player like fear or tension is a much easier than getting a positive one like happiness or laughter and we don't want the player to be happy to be in their current situation in mission five. We want the player to be scared and surprised constantly as they travel through these mainly bug environments, limiting the player's visibility is one of the ways we're going to achieve this."

Players won't be completely in the dark, but to help create those scares and surprises, Strangelite have been careful to keep the range of the player's torch quite short. "Seeing what's coming down these tunnels will be difficult for the player," explains Jones. "They will be much more reliant on their sense of hearing. The player will have various other aids other than their torch, they have 'Glow-rods' that can be thrown and will dimly light up the area where they land for an amount of time, alternatively the player may choose to switch a Glow-rod into 'Flare' mode. Flares light up a greater area around them when they land but only last half as long as the Glow-rods."

There will also be other sources of light, Jones continues: "In certain places underground the rock itself may give off an ambient glow of its own due to mineral deposits embedded in it." Then, there are the Sentinel bugs, the Arachnids' early warning system. These creatures scan their immediate environment with two antennae equipped with lights on the end. "If the player alerts a Sentinel bug to their presence it will tuck these antennae in and 'turn off'," Jones explains, "thus the light source will be lost. If the player then continues to advance towards the Sentinel's position it will suddenly jump up and run like crazy to warn other bugs nearby, with its back end lit up like a high powered lightbulb."

And, exploiting the adaptive lighting system Binks refers to in 'The Light Fantastic', the Sentinels will sometimes use their lightbulb effect to temporarily blind a player to cover their escape.



**"It's a nasty little bleeder with a great big horn on the front."**

attacks, the Strangelite team came up with the cliff mite, a miniature version of the giant, artillery-like plasma bugs. They hide in the mountains, chewing on rocks which they turn into a plasma solution and spit at you. Then, there's the rippler, adopted from the animated series. A kind of assassin, he can run, swim and fly and Strangelite have even added a cloaking device. "He's going to track you for long periods and find the best time to kill you," adds McCann. Another interesting bug is the sentinel. "The bugs need an early warning system in the tunnels and this guy supplies it. He's basically a big light and will sit there in the dark until you come along, when he'll light up and run off and warn all the other bugs." Unless, of course, you can shoot him in time.

So much for the Arachnids but where do you come in? The opening of the game shows the same disastrous Klendathu night landing that began the film, and when it all goes wrong, a captain rescues your grunt. "The next time you see the game in action," outlines Jones, "it'll

be five years on and you've progressed up the ranks and are in this elite squad now. These special forces will just run out and obliterate everything because they've got more powerful guns – rocket launchers, guided missiles – whereas the grunts have just got the normal guns in the film."

Casting the player as a special forces operative was a key design decision for Strangelite, as it allowed the player to swing the tide of battles – and gave them a bit of armour so they wouldn't peg it immediately on contact with the Arachnids like so many of the grunts. Another major decision was to give the player unlimited ammo for their main assault rifle. With the bugs coming thick and fast, it was thought that the last thing the player wanted to be burdened with was constant magazine changes. "You've always got the main rifle to fall back on," reasons Jones, "and it will do a good enough job all the way through the game, but the other guns will do a better job for a short amount of time." As for your squad, they'll be

*"Would you like to know more?"*







## MORE BANGS PER BUG



Always check the spelling before hiring a Beatles lookalike band.

following orders, their tactics pre-planned by the level designer. "The difficulty with squad design is if you add too much intelligence, they'll complete the game for you," argues Binks. "So it's more along the *Call of Duty* style where they're told where to go and you have to fill in the gaps. That produces much more gameplay than if they were fully intelligent and therefore capable of what you're supposed to be doing."

Back to the story. The events of the movie only take the player through the first of the three five-mission campaigns. Strangelite don't want to reveal too much about the final campaign as yet but the second sees the humans driving back the Arachnids and attempting to track down a Queen bug. In one mission, plasma bugs are picking off all your drop ships, so you're charged with scaling a mountain to lay markers for your bombers. The mountain – a concept sketch looks like a cross between an oversized termite

mound and Hieronymus Bosch's Tower of Babel – is one of many, and as you're taking out one, other squads will be doing the same, so you'll see the other mountains blowing up in the far background.

Later in the campaign, you have to fight your way across a huge bridge defended by Arachnids although this is still but a taster, claims Jones. "The mission after the bridge is the biggest one we've done so far," he says. "The battles in *The Lord of the Rings* are a good comparison, as is *Zulu*. It's in a massive valley and there's an earthquake in the centre, and all these bugs run down and you're coming down as well, and you meet in the middle. It's pretty mental, that one."

Citing the pell-mell of the Omaha Beach sequence of *Medal of Honour*, Jones states confidently that, "It's only ever going to escalate from that. The whole game is trying to be that intense. Obviously, there are

"If we gave the squad too much intelligence, they'd finish the game for you..."



## I LOST MY HEART TO...

*Starship Troopers* has two main types of soldier in the Mobile Infantry. First up, and most common, are the standard troopers. These are the grunts of the game and, as in the movie, are used as cannon fodder. "You'll come across grunts in battles throughout the game," says lead artist Andy McCann, "and they're going to be

getting ripped and torn to shreds as you go in to save the day." That's because you play a Marauder, equipped with better armour, better weapons. McCann: "You are in a special forces team that deals with trouble spots. And as the army advances, they might leave these trouble spots for you and you're sent in to deal with them." Other troop types will also feature, including Psy-Ops operatives, commanding officers and, leading the squad in the field, captain characters. "The captain has a jump pack and jump boots, and has a visor with his whole squad's stats on it," expands McCann. "This is a real kick-ass hard guy, he's a veteran who's been through the ranks over years and years."

going to be quiet periods but most of the levels have got a battle sequence that'll raise your temperature." After all this talk of teeming hordes of bugs inundating the humans, you could forgiven for thinking that *Starship Troopers* might play like a souped up *Doom*, target practice for the frag-starved. This is just what Strangelite are working on now, getting a feel for the gameplay implications of what they're trying to create. "In the huge battles that take







place in *Call of Duty* and, to some extent, in *Halo*, the enemy have all got ranged weapons and they can fire at you from distance," muses Jones. "We need ours to be in your face, two or three metres away from you. Balancing that is the tricky bit, so that's what I'm concentrating on at the moment, getting one of these big battle scenes up and running. That'll be the testbed for the rest of the game." Simply standing there and firing into a mass of bugs won't

be an option, then. Instead, it seems as if you'll be constantly prioritising, trying to pick out the more dangerous, specialist bugs while keeping the onrushing warriors at bay.

Strangelite seem intent on wringing all they can from their rich source material, and the rescue sorties, desperate last stands and grand battles they have planned should make for an epic spectacle when the game arrives at the end of

**"The battles in The Lord of the Rings are a good comparison, as is Zulu."**

the year. And here's a teasing thought to leave you with. All the numbers bandied around as to how many bugs'll be on screen at once are, according to Jones, conservative estimates. "You might think three or four hundred's a lot but it's not," he smiles. "We already know we're well capable of doing that." Praise the Lord and pass the pesticide.

■ Expect *Starship Troopers* to be bugging you before Christmas.



# BLACK & WHITE 2

We spend a day tethered to Peter Molyneux with a Leash of Learning.

By TIM STONE



## BLACK & WHITE 2 AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Electronic Arts

**Developer:**  
Lionhead

**Genre:** Strategy

**Estimated Minimum System:**  
PIII 733, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card

**Contact:**  
www2.bw game.com

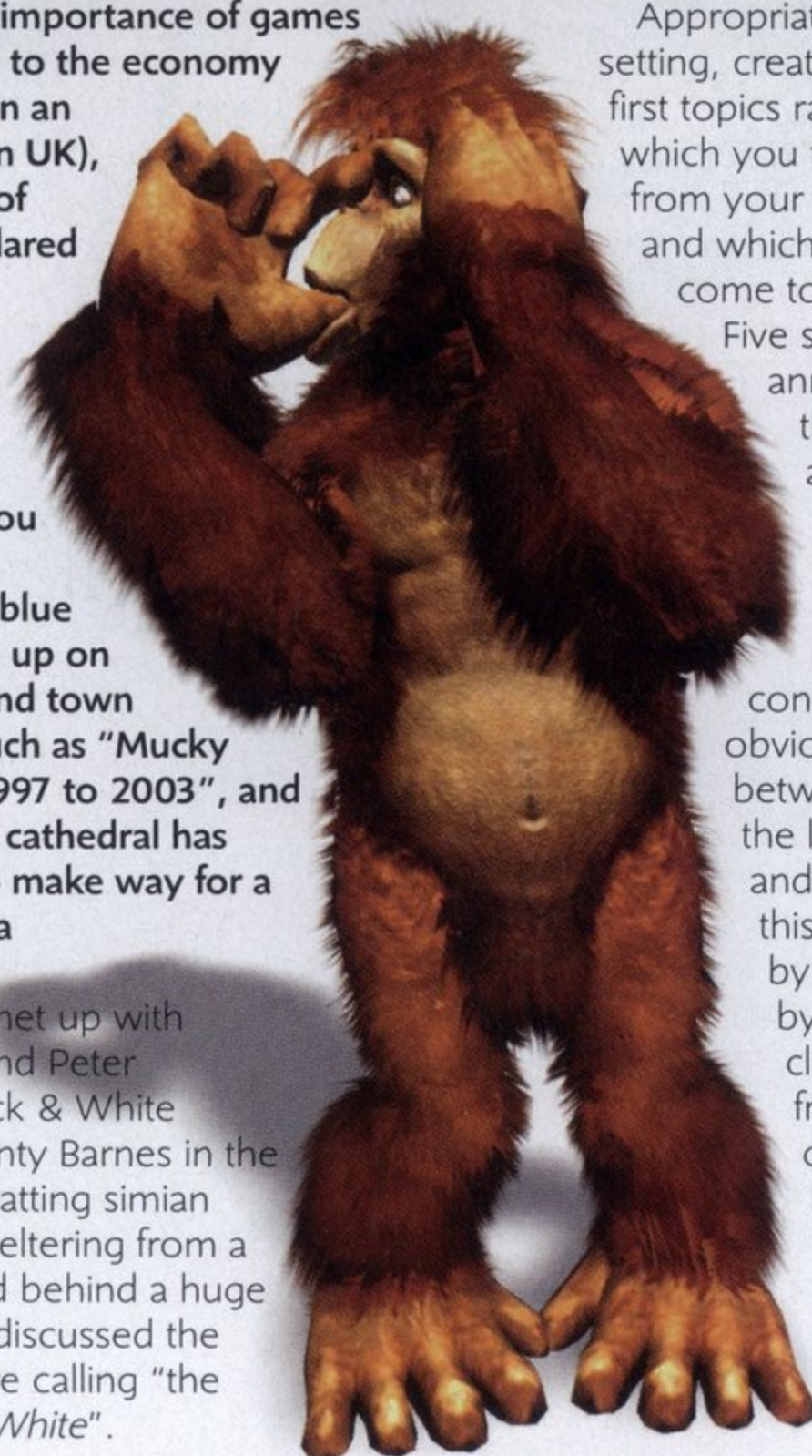
**Release Date:**  
Spring

**What's in it for you?**

New cuddlier creatures, a stronger story, drudgery-free town tending, and bloody big bloody battles.

**DUE** to the importance of games design to the economy of Guildford (a town an hour out of London UK), the local chamber of commerce has declared 2004 "Guildford Game Year". Signs have been erected on all the main roads into the city saying stuff like "You are now entering Bullfrog country", blue plaques have gone up on key buildings around town with inscriptions such as "Mucky Foot toiled here, 1997 to 2003", and the imposing brick cathedral has been torn down to make way for a 400ft sculpture of a defecating ape.

Recently we met up with development legend Peter Molyneux and Black & White Studios honcho Jonty Barnes in the shadow of this squatting simian colossus, and – sheltering from a biting easterly wind behind a huge bronze turd – we discussed the game that many are calling "the sequel to *Black & White*".



Appropriately, considering the setting, creatures were one of the first topics raised: the creatures which you train and nurture from your godly perspective, and which awe-struck humans come to revere, love or fear.

Five species have been announced thus far and, though these all appeared in the original game, giant graphical leaps mean there's no danger whatsoever of confusion. The most obvious differences between old and new are the lavish polygon counts and the luxurious pelts this time around. Ruffled by breezes, bedraggled by rain, singed by fire, clotted with blood from leaking wounds or ripped out in tufts by the claws of assailants, fur is now so realistically rendered that fleas from passing pets will throw

themselves at your monitor while you play. Together with more expressive faces, more numerous and subtle animations and more sensitive alignment morphing, it seems certain that the *B&W2* beasts will be amongst the most visually arresting, emotionally endearing characters ever committed to code.

The chance to slough these stunning skins, swapping species at particular points in the story, is one feature not carried over from the first outing. Similarly, those self-contained sparring matches have been consigned to the dung heap of development history, replaced by a far grander, far more brutal form of warfare involving both creatures and sprawling citizen armies. Our hosts wouldn't be drawn on maximum military headcounts but glimpses of the pitched battles looked impressive enough. Medieval meat-grinding will always butter our parsnips. Season it with spectacular sorcery, fabulous physics and awesome outsized animals that, if suitably trained, will happily rip out the throat of a counterpart then sup blood from the ragged hole, and it's hard to imagine how things could go awry.

Hard to imagine, but *not* wholly impossible. Despite Jonty's repeated explanations it was still difficult to grasp



## SMOKE AND MIRRORS

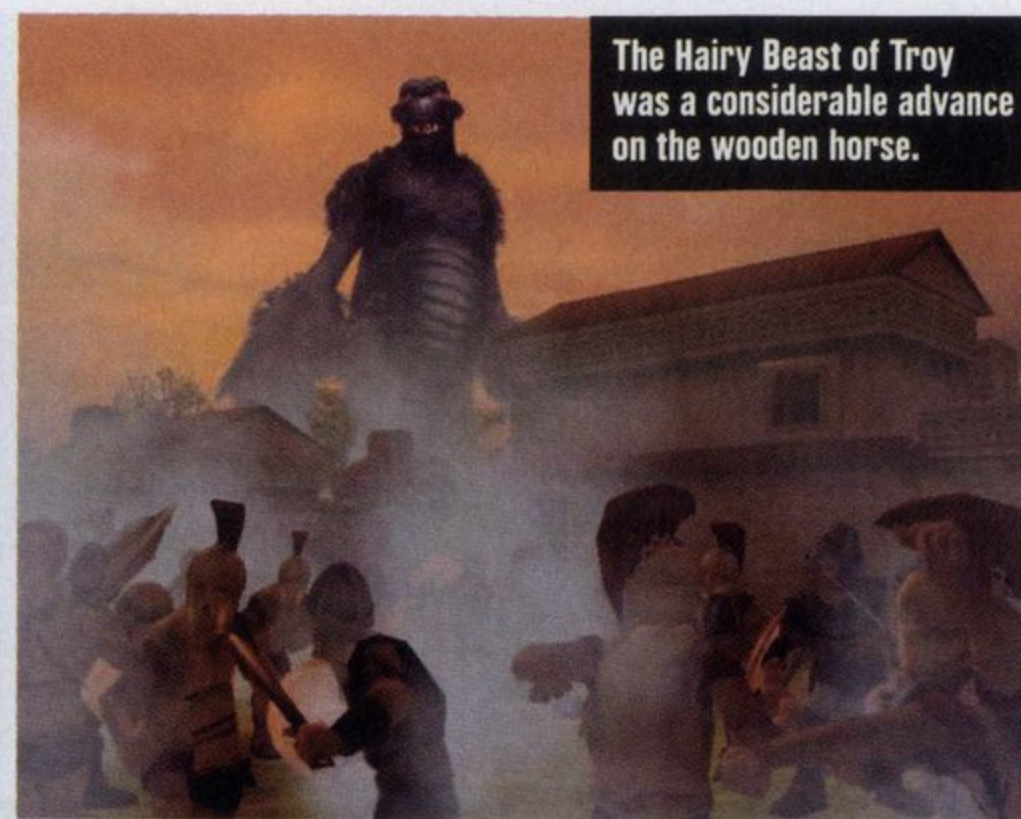
Using a single sardine sandwich to feed 5,000 hungry diners might impress simple, rustic souls, but if you really want to win over convinced sceptics you have to come up with something a little larger in the miracle line. We recommend either a magma-spouting mountain, or a huge blue-skinned naked chanteuse.



The Siren can be combined with some deft wall-building to create miniature concentration camps for enchanted enemies. A favourite Molyneux strategy, apparently.

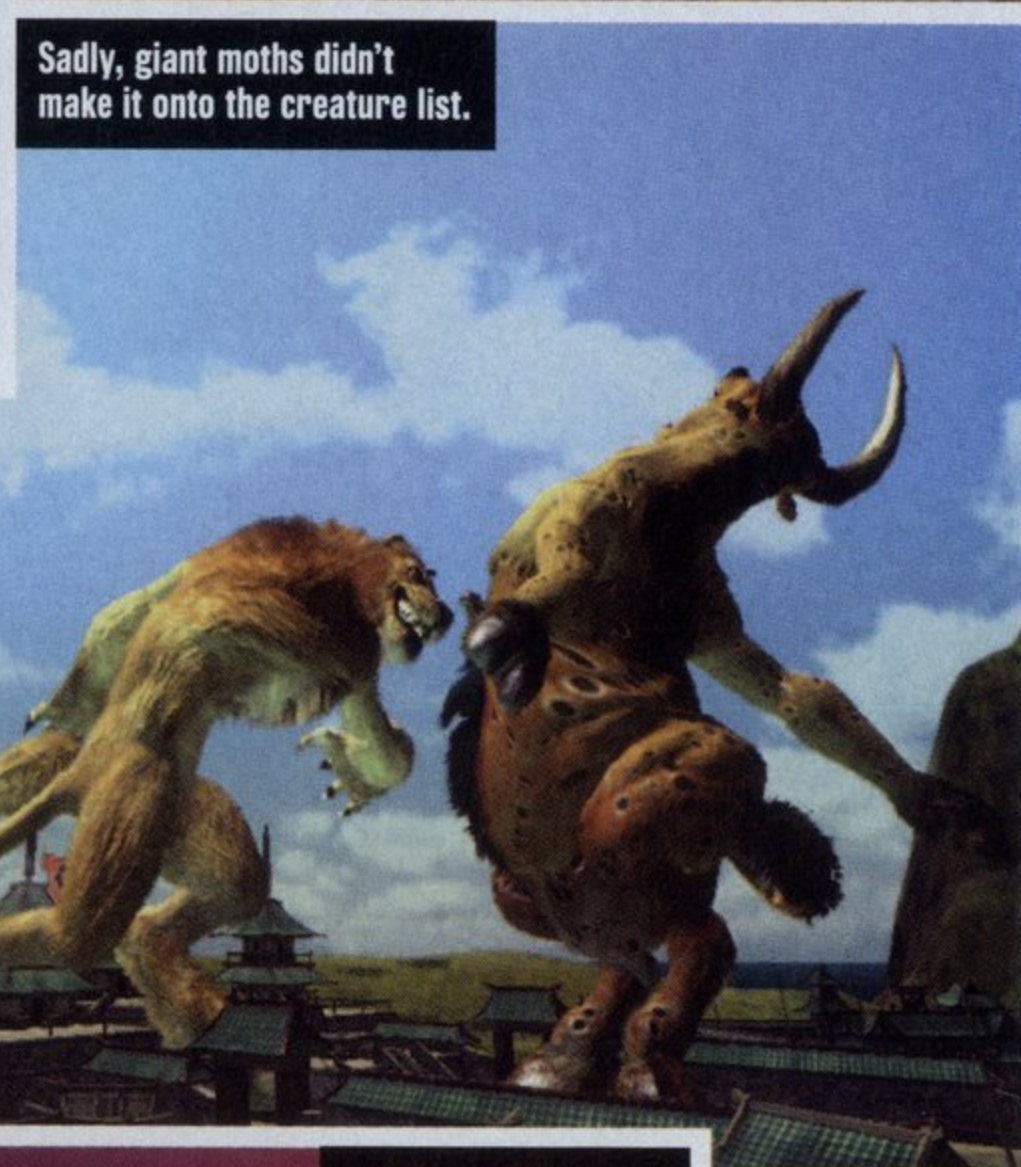


Lava streams from Volcanoes incinerate everything in their path. When they do eventually cool and harden, a fireball can be used to coax them back to life.

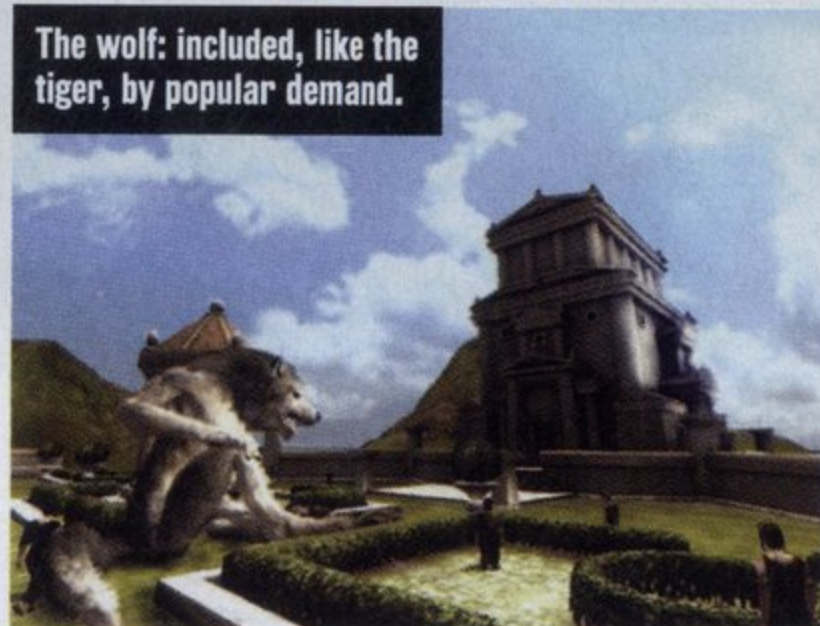


The Hairy Beast of Troy was a considerable advance on the wooden horse.

Sadly, giant moths didn't make it onto the creature list.



The wolf: included, like the tiger, by popular demand.



Luckily, buildings now come prefabricated.

exactly how armies are to be directed, and tactics implemented, in the heat of battle. There's much evidence of backtracking and simplification in terms of the interface in *B&W2* (movement, camera controls and spell-casting are all far more conventional than they were) but talk of a novel system of control "threads", rally flags, context-sensitive cursors and selectable manoeuvre blueprints left us a little anxious about martial marshalling.

If the means of controlling troops turn out to be half as elegant as those for constructing static defences then there will be nothing at all to worry about. Wall erection is particularly satisfying at present – a sinuous sweep of the mouse pointer painting serpentine city wall foundations directly onto the scenery. Defensively minded deities can teach their animal assistants to repair breaches in bulwarks like these. Whether caused by a catapulted boulder or a giant paw, such rents have a pleasing plausibility about them – the new physics engine meaning masonry shatters naturalistically rather than along pre-programmed fault lines.

Ramparts are just one form of obstacle at a defender's disposal. Typical

## "SPECTACULAR SORCERY, FABULOUS PHYSICS AND AWESOME OUTSIZED ANIMALS..."

of the way miracles have been revamped, fireballs can now be wrung out like dirty dishcloths over terrain to create blazing barriers similar to *Stronghold's* pitch ditches. The influence of *Firefly's* crenellated charmer, and older, historical municipal management sims like *Caesar* and *Pharaoh*, is also evident inside *B&W2* burghs where there appears to have been a very deliberate effort to add texture and interest to town planning.

Saintly overseers who skip on urban enhancements like parks, statues and taverns run the risk of cultivating discontent, just as black-hearted overlords who hold back on the heads-on-spikes risk forfeiting the fear and fidelity of their flock. Soul shepherds who

invest massive amounts of time and resources in moulding and managing metropolises will see a direct payoff in the shape of mass migrations from neighbouring, less impressive communities. Although such movements of populations will bring their own problems – overcrowding being the most obvious one – they should provide a viable alternative avenue to victory for players with little appetite for aggression.

As we parted company with Peter and Jonty and began wending our way back to the station (passing as we did a park bench dedicated to the memory of *Lost Toys*), even the wariest among us to had to admit that *Black & White 2* was looking reassuringly wonderful.

### TALKING IN CODE



We paid peanuts and got a monkey to tell us about-

Actually I'm not a monkey, I'm an ape. See, no tail.

**PCGA:** Yes, but that wouldn't have worked. Wasn't much of a joke anyway.

**PCGA:** Just tell us about the improvements to creature training, OK?

All the confusion in *B&W* over punishment and rewards is gone. You now know exactly what behaviour you are encouraging or discouraging, and have the useful ability to look into your creature's mind at any time to gauge its mood and personality. I did specify dry-roasted, didn't I?



# WARLORDS BATTLECRY III

Raargh!!! Our local RTS development is getting shouty.

By TIM EDWARDS



## 2D NOT DATED

Lead Designer Steve Fawcner refuses to apologise for the failure of the *Warlord* series to move into three dimensions. "2D games still have advantages over 3D. Their graphics are sharper, so it's easier to pick out detailed information when your screen fills up with troops running to and fro." In *Warlords*, that's a major advantage. "With 2D we can maintain high framerates with hundreds of troops fighting, casting spells at each other and dying, while remaining comfortable on lower-end PCs." Scrap that GeForce card now.



## WARLORDS BATTLECRY III AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Enlight

**Developer:**  
Infinite  
Interactive

**Genre:**  
RTS

**Estimated  
Minimum  
System:**  
PIII 450,  
128Mb RAM

**Contact:**  
www.enlight.  
com/wbc3

**Release Date:**  
June 2004

**What's in it  
for you?**  
*Warcraft III*-both-  
ering real-time  
strategy from  
our small but  
proud Aussie  
development  
scene.

**HOW** can the little man compete? That's the question worrying Steve Fawcner, Lead Designer on *Warlords Battlecry III*. "Although hundreds of thousands of people have bought and enjoyed *Warlords Battlecry*, we're not a household name yet like *Warcraft*. But do we compete with them on features? I think we compete and in many cases exceed them."

Big words from a small fish. But fascinating all the same. *WB III* comes with a healthy dose of ambition. It attempts something that *Warcraft III* doesn't: deep and meaningful character development within a single-player story. The *Battlecry* series offers hardcore real-time strategy, with 'role-playing elements': a much-maligned phrase. What does it actually mean? According to Steve, it means providing a player character who develops over time. "Our hero system really gives a connection between battles. There's always just one more level to get, or one more item to find, or one more quest to complete. I believe the hero system is what keeps you playing *Battlecry III* - it's the reason (along with the storyline) that when you finish one battle you immediately want to start another."

## "YOU CAN ELECT TO TAKE YOUR HEROES ONLINE AND FIGHT AGAINST OTHER PLAYERS..."

Progression comes with options: over 16 races and 28 classes to choose from, ranging from the Undead to the Living and back again.

It all comes together in multi-player, where the hero you've been working on in the single-player game emerges as an all-conquering monster. Don't worry about balance issues, Steve has them under control: "You can elect to take your heroes online and fight against other players. We have a handicapping system in place so that lower-level heroes get to take more troops into the game."

What of the storyline? "The *Warlords* games are all based in the world of Etheria," says Steve. "In *Battlecry III*, the Selenites, a race of human merchants and explorers, have discovered a continent to the south, not unlike the Spanish discovering the Americas. This continent is filled with riches, which the Selenites set about gathering, while slaughtering the local Ssrathi."

Trample the weak for a high score, then. Steve is more than proud of the scale of the conquest. "There is just so much gameplay and variety in here that it is astounding. *Warlords Battlecry II* was a huge improvement over the first one, and I believe this is another huge improvement again. There are so many areas of the game to explore, so many races to master and to fight against, an epic story, awesome multi-player, heroes to develop, 130 different spells to cast, hundreds of unique magic items to collect, mercenary bands to hire." Bar Mitzvahs, weddings, birthday parties, all catered for...

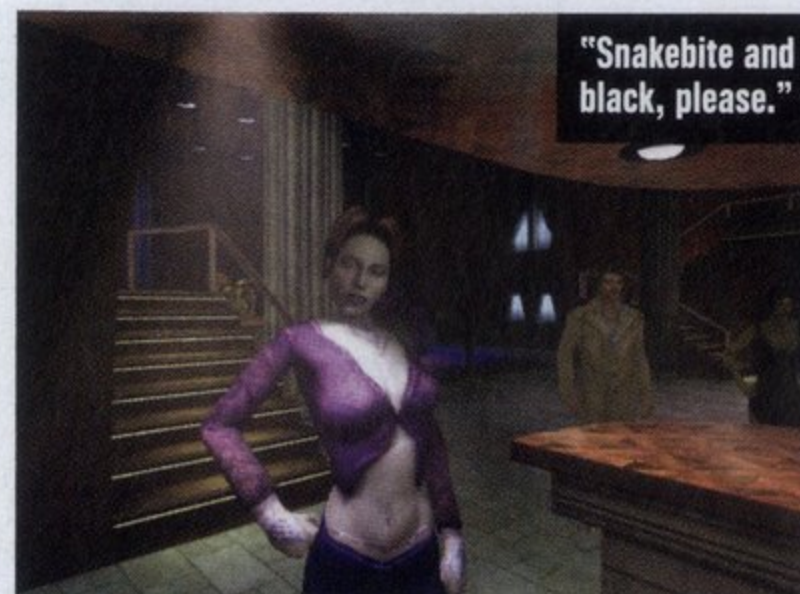
To prevent these details overwhelming the nervous player, Infinite Interactive are polishing their interface. "It's no good having lots of stuff in your game if people can't play it, and to that end I think that anybody should be able to jump right in and start clubbing goblins." A laudable goal. Unless you're a goblin.



# VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE BLOODLINES

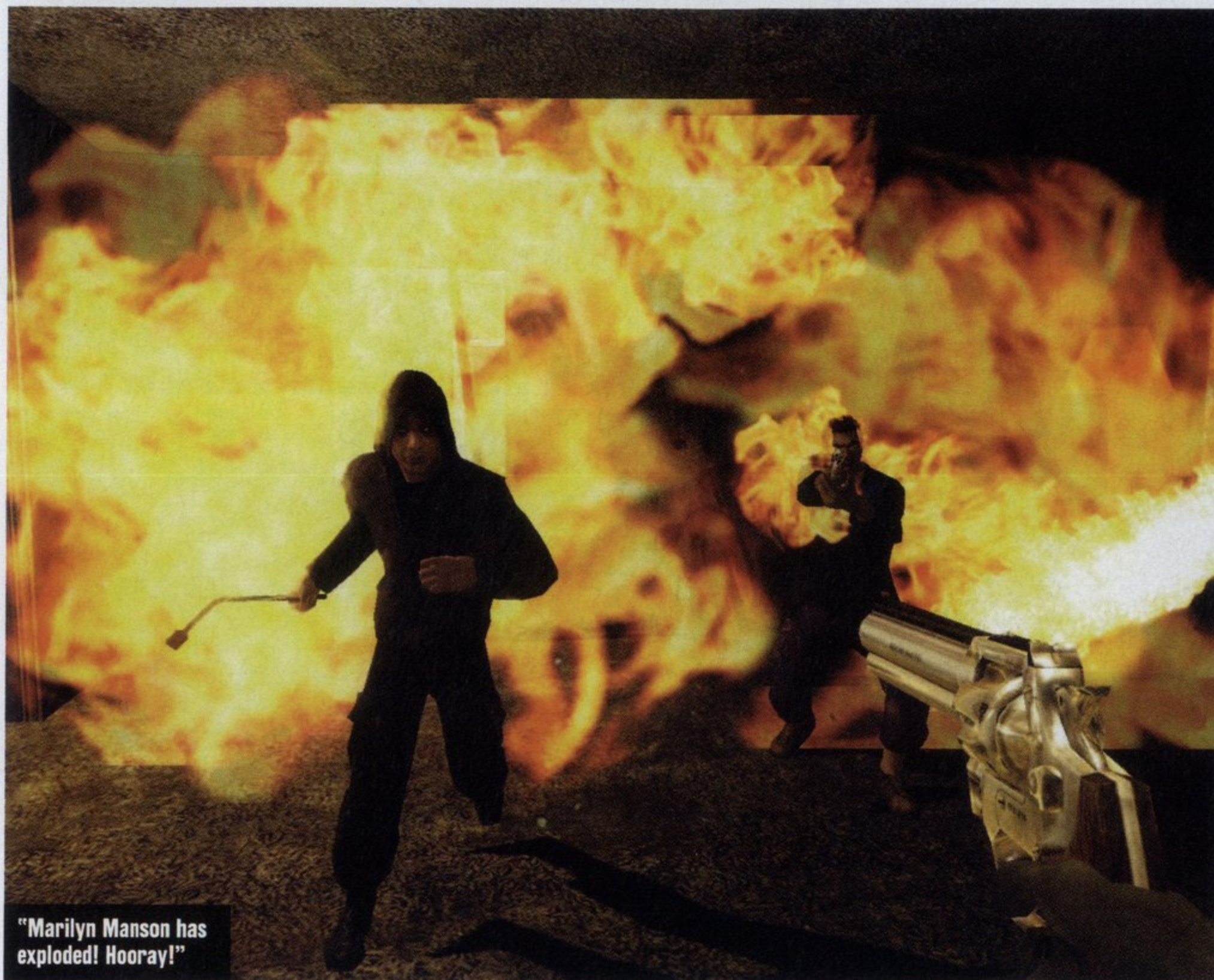
For a game of gothic pretension, there's nothing pretend about its potential.

By KIERON GILLEN



## WORLD OF DARKNESS

Characters are apt to speak profanely. "Early on we second-guessed ourselves a little," notes Leonard Boyarsky, "Are people going to be turned off by this? We've had people say 'I loved it... but do you think other people will be shocked?' I think people understand they are characters. It's not done arbitrarily or for shock value."



**YES**, it uses the much-hyped *Half-Life 2* engine, but having seen *Vampire* in action and talked to Troika, that's the least important thing about this action-RPG. Yes, the graphics are lovely, but the game would work just as well on the *Unreal* engine. What matters is that with *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Invisible War* out of the way, *Vampire* – based firmly on the brilliant *World of Darkness* goth-poseur dice game – looks to be the game that best personifies the continued renaissance of the RPG.

"RPGs were dying a slow death when we made *Fallout*. And then *Baldur's Gate* and... well, I'd like to think we were part of the reason why RPGs made a comeback," Leonard Boyarsky, joint-CEO of Troika grins. "Which may be a little arrogant of me." Perhaps. But not actually wrong either. "Now I feel we're entering a new stage," he continues. "I think people are trying to do different things and push it on now."

*Vampire* certainly appears to be. Despite the first-person perspective and occasional action leanings, it's very much an RPG with the sort of multi-route to success that personified *Deus Ex* – and Troika's

## "WE KICK DOWN THE DOOR AND CAUSE OUR FOES TO FALL TO THE FLOOR VOMITING BLOOD."

*Arcanum*. "The complete open-endedness of *Arcanum* was good on one hand, but also let you have a completely lousy experience," Leonard says. "*Vampire's* White Wolf system gives you points which make it more predictable. Certain clans are geared towards stealth – others are geared towards leadership. There are fewer permutations to balance for." The clans are the centre of the *Vampire* world. They provide a structure for the game, while their seven classes, varying from stealth to combat to diplomacy-centred broods, ensure there are plenty of role-playing options.

Playing through a sequence with a variety of characters demonstrates the game's richness. A beach hut contains some explosives we need, guarded by thugs. On the first play, as a suave Toreador, we simply persuade and charm our way past the guards and get a deal on the items in question. Next, as a misshapen Nosferatu,

we move through the shadows, dodge guards and sneak off with the prize. And as a Brujah – well – we kick down the front door and cause our foes to fall to the floor vomiting blood. Simple.

There will be sections that are even more action-orientated, but these are to be balanced for the diplomatic types with extra information, followers or equipment that less personable vampires won't receive.

As Activision Executive Producer Thaine Lyman puts it, "If you want to go from mission to mission and just blow people away... this isn't the game for you. It's an RPG at its core. It's just not the old skool..." Clearly there are problems ahead, and they aren't even talking about the multi-player stuff yet. However – whisper it – on a personal level, this role-playing multi-task-loving journalist is more excited by the prospect of entering this world than anything Gordon Freeman could offer.

## VAMPIRE AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Activision

**Developer:**  
Troika

**Genre:**  
Role-playing

**Estimated Minimum System:**  
PIII 1.2GHz,  
128Mb, GeForce  
4 32Mb

**Contact:**  
www.vampire  
bloodlines.com

**Release Date:**  
"After  
*Half-Life 2*"

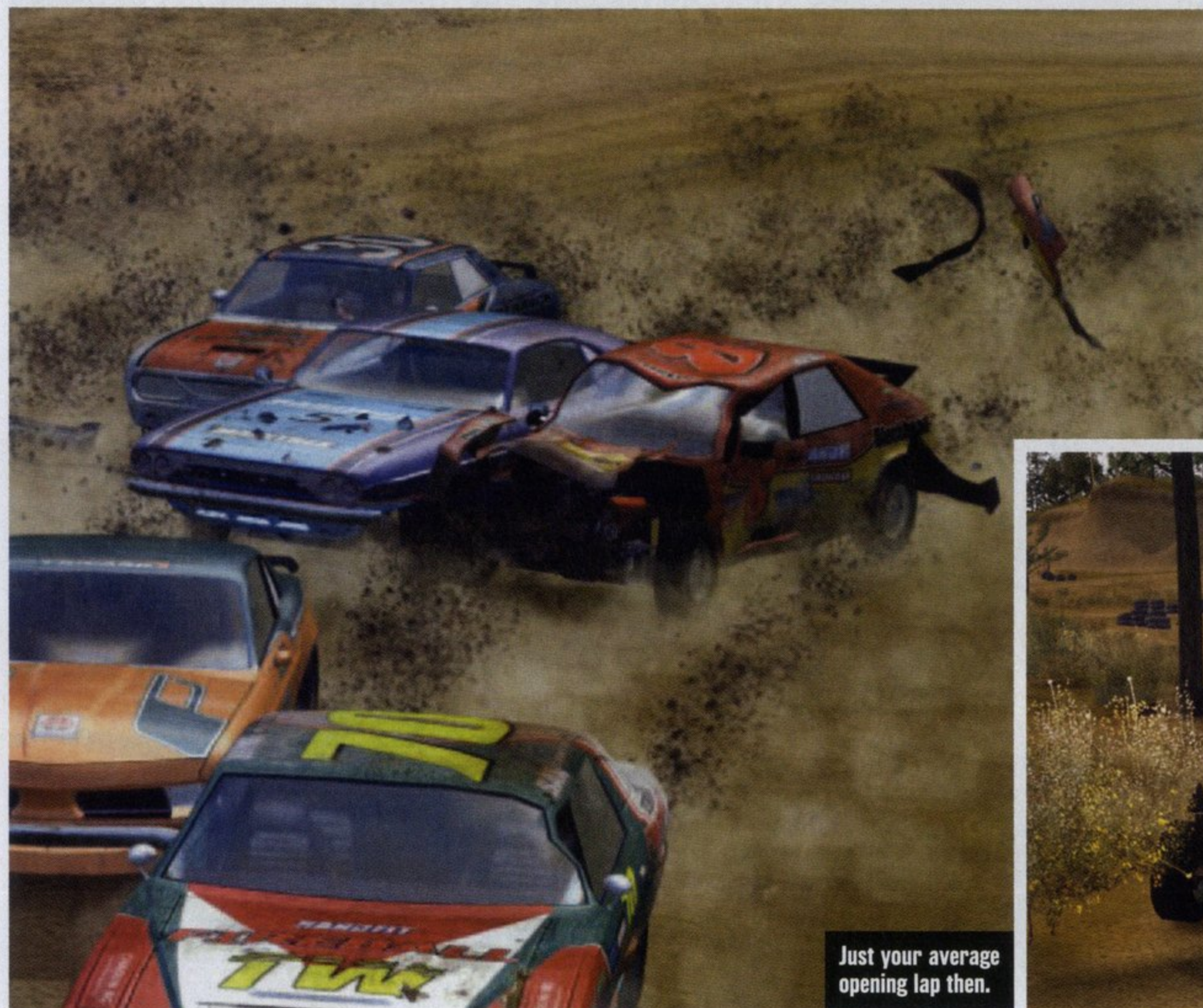
**What's in it for you?**  
Vampire-heavy RPG action for grown-ups.



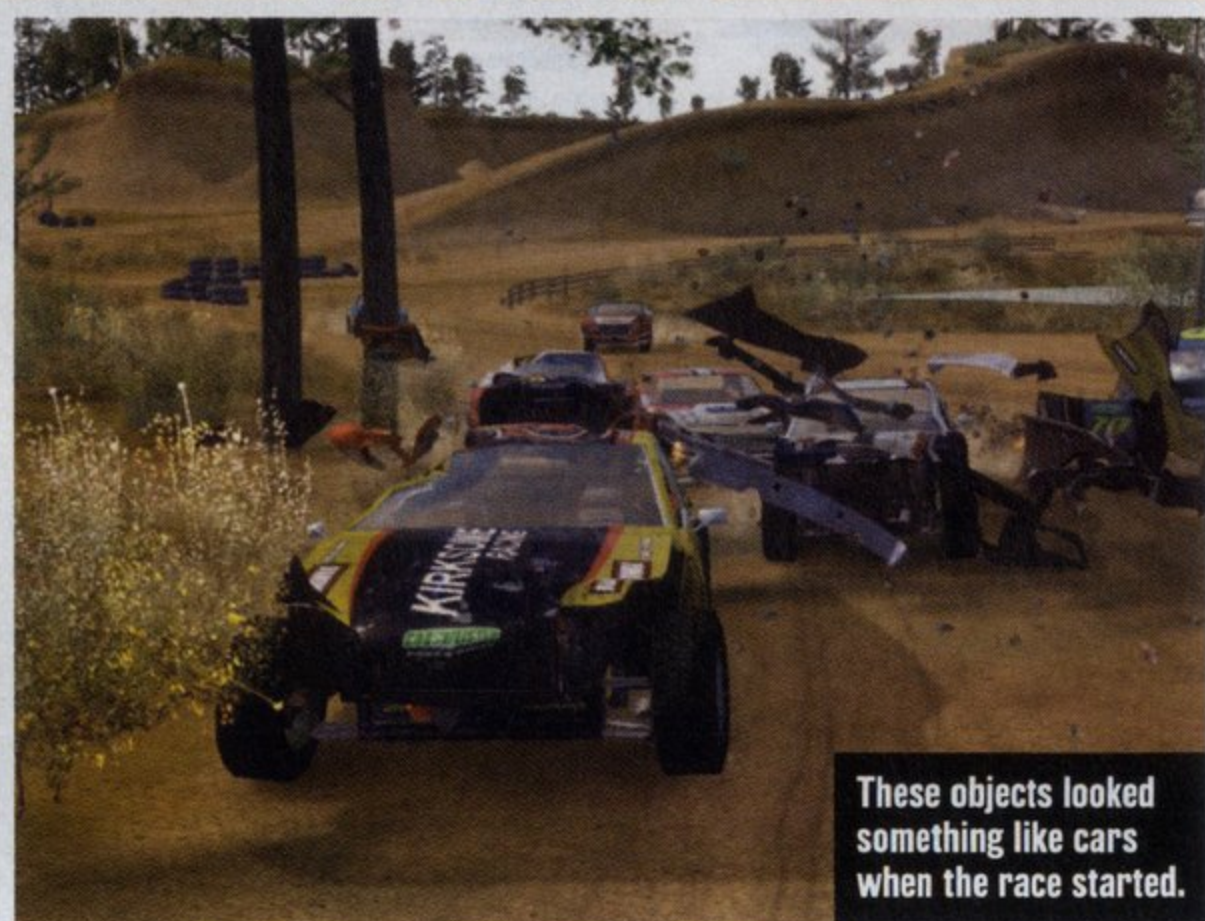
# FLATOUT

So you want more from a racer? Then it's time to put your foot down.

By MARK SUTHERNS



Just your average opening lap then.



## FLATOUT AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Empire Interactive

**Developer:**  
Bugbear

**Genre:**  
Racing simulation

**Estimated Minimum System:**  
TBC

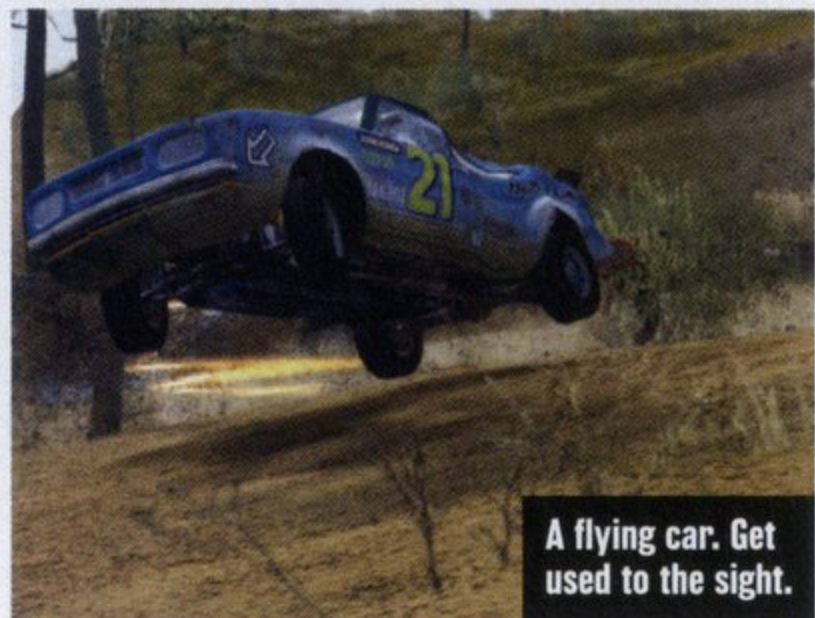
**Contact:**  
www.empireinteractive.co.uk

**Release Date:**  
TBC

**What's in it for you?**  
Rally gone mad in a dynamic, open environment with real-time damage and ragdoll drivers.

**THE** windscreen is shattered, the bonnet buckled, the passenger door merely a memory. As you grapple with a ravaged gearbox, your twisted shell of a car crawls towards the finish line, hunted relentlessly by the driver you forced into that water tower two laps ago. The track changes with each collision, each spectacular crash, but you're oblivious to the debris that comes flailing your way. This will be a hellish final lap but you're driving to win. You're driving *FlatOut*.

This new flavour of rally racing is on course to send the whole petrol-soaked genre skidding violently off its driving line.



A flying car. Get used to the sight.

Capturing the twin thrills of speed and destruction, *FlatOut* will put you behind the wheel of a car that feels alive and vulnerable, to race on tracks that accumulate deadly new obstacles as the laps tick by. Finnish developers Bugbear are already putting a distance between them and the rest of the field. And they're doing it with one eye on traffic from an entirely different direction.

## "YOU'VE NEVER RACED WITH A TRAFFIC CONE TRAPPED UNDER YOUR FRONT WHEEL BEFORE."

"One of the games we were, and still are, looking up to is *Half-Life 2*," says Aki Jarvilehto, Bugbear's Business Development Director. "When we first saw it we wondered what would happen if you took the same kind of physics and applied them to a racing game. Nobody has done that kind of thing before".

A cheeky comparison perhaps, but think back to Valve's earlier *HL2* movies, to those dynamic environments and the incredible in-game physics that reacted to

Gordon's every move. Where every action seemed to have a consequence in the world around him. Then take *FlatOut* for a spin and, by the time you've reached fourth gear, it hits you. Throw Gordon's crowbar in the boot, chuck him a helmet and a set of keys and you'd have *FlatOut*.

Bugbear's technology isn't new, however. Under *FlatOut*'s bonnet is the same engine that powered their 2000

racer, *Rally Trophy*, but four years of tuning and tweaking have created physics that bear comparison to Valve's Source technology. The 15 courses span dustbowls and forests, asphalt circuits and cityscapes, each with its own brand of shortcuts and obstacles, each a big box of toys waiting for the roaring hulks of metal to come out to play.

"Pretty much everything on the courses is interactive," says Bugbear's MD, Janne Alanenpaa. "If a car hits a pylon it



## CAREERING OFF

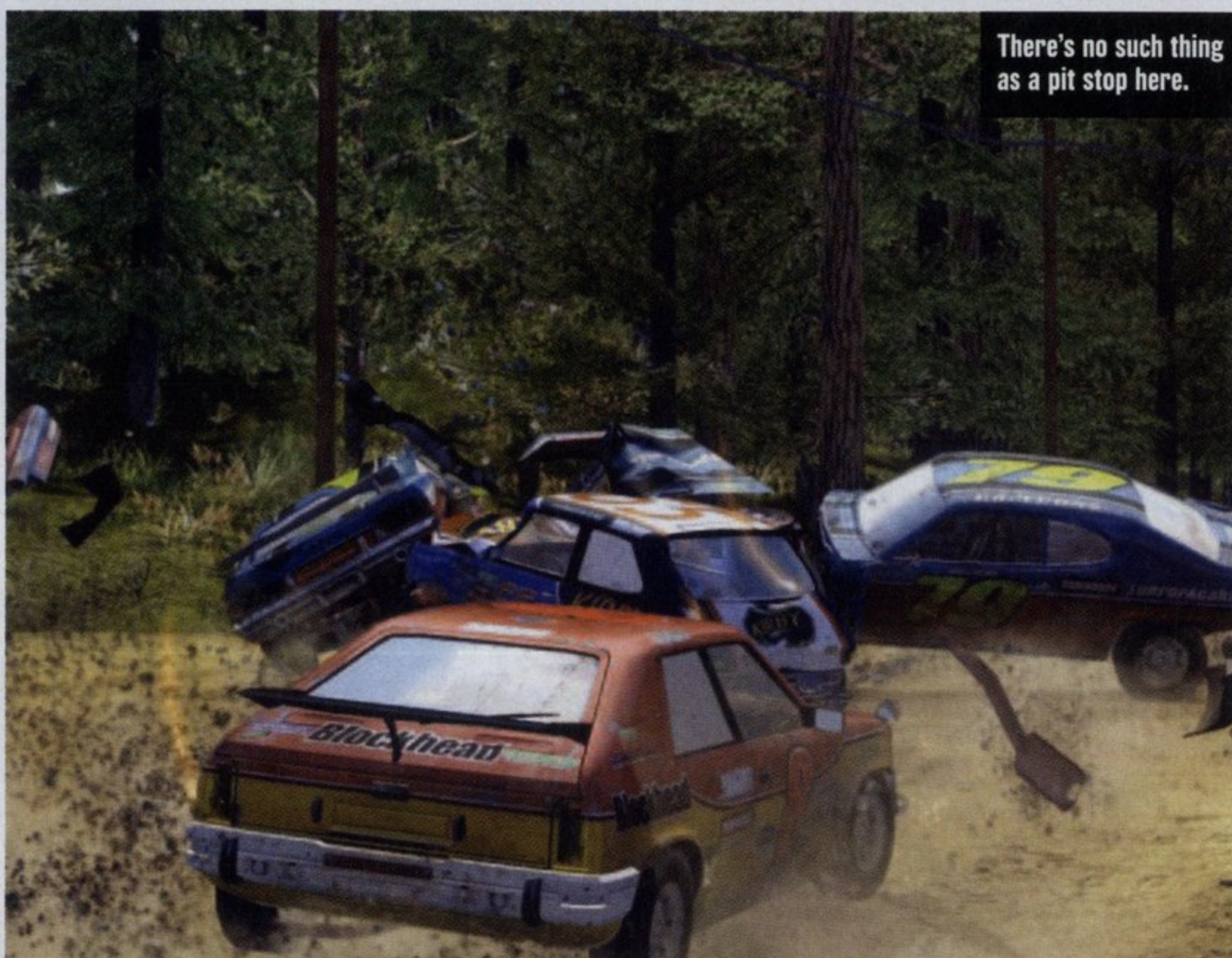
The core component of the single-player experience, career mode is where you'll earn the respect and the big bucks. Three classes of racing are available on each of the 15 tracks, which can be raced in day or night with varying weather conditions. Each completed track will unlock the next as layouts become more complex, and obstacles more challenging. Work your way up the racing ladder and the AI aggression levels and violence out on the track increase. You'll need to dip into the mini-game selection to earn cash for garage upgrades and new cars if you're going to compete.



Driving on the Moon.



There's no such thing as a pit stop here.



Every spectator takes home a souvenir bumper.



The action goes quite literally off road.

will collapse and you'll see the cabling and the electricity reacting. The kind of thing you'll see in *Half-Life 2*."

The feeling of racing in such dynamic environments is intoxicating. You've seen lines of cones and banks of tyres in games before but you've never seen them scatter, bounce and roll across the track on impact so realistically. You've never raced half a lap with a cone trapped under your front wheel or a tyre rolling around on your bonnet before. And you've never had to cope with a course that reacts so dramatically to the race that's going on around you. These dynamic environments have an appetite for destruction that is ably fed by another of the game's showpiece features: the real-time damage model.

"So far nobody has attempted this," says Alanenpaa. "We work with two different models for each car: the undamaged and the completely wrecked version. When you receive damage we're calculating that on the fly: as the car moves closer to the completely wrecked version it's being modelled exactly as it happens."

The cars are made up of 40 separate components, each with its own hit points. These components then degenerate with every prang, bang and all-out crash. Panels get beaten and bumpers come loose as cars get tossed around the circuit like drawing pins. It doesn't take long for the cars to begin to shed their wreckage to form a minefield of debris around the circuit.

Jarvillehto tells us more: "After just a few laps the track is going to be littered with wreckage, you will have never seen so much in a game. The results of damage to your car and the environment don't vanish, so the tracks are alive, they're going to be different every time you run them."

Balancing the visual impact of this revolutionary damage model with the actual handling of the car is Bugbear's next major task. *Rally Trophy*, for all its realism, was a stubborn beast to tame and Bugbear are clearly intent on creating a more accessible driving experience with *FlatOut*. It means shoving realism into the back seat. "The damage model isn't being designed to be realistic. That would mean that one over-

continued over

## SILENT NITRO

*FlatOut's* 'Nitro' feature will always give you a chance to get yourself back in the race if you're lagging behind. This temporary boost of speed might do the trick if you time it right on a straight, but it will make your car far more difficult to handle, particularly on corners. Mr McRae would choke on his haggis at the lack of realism, but it's a nice arcade touch without any *Mario* foolery.



Banks of tyres do what they can to ease your oversteering habit.

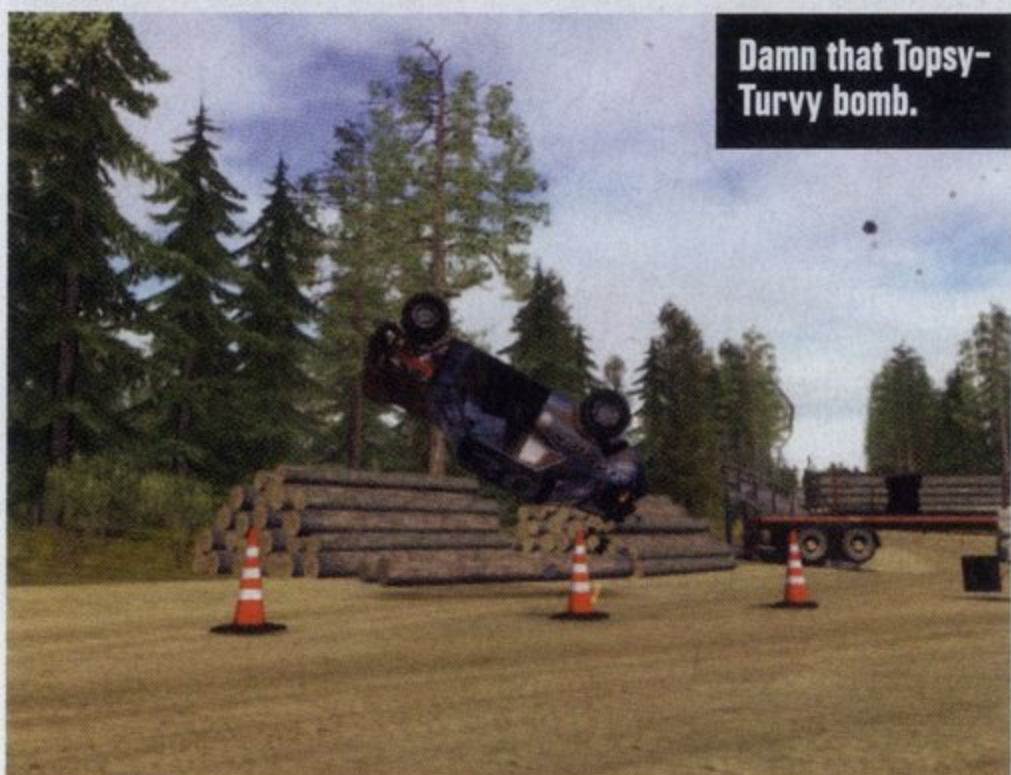


## CAR WARS

Your career starts with a beat-up four wheeler that handles like a bathtub on pram wheels compared to the other 15 vehicles. Fear not. A few early placings and a dabble in the mini-games will soon earn you the cash to trade in. There are no licensed cars to choose from – *FlatOut's* destructive model made this impossible – but each dented bucket of bolts will be unique in its power and handling.



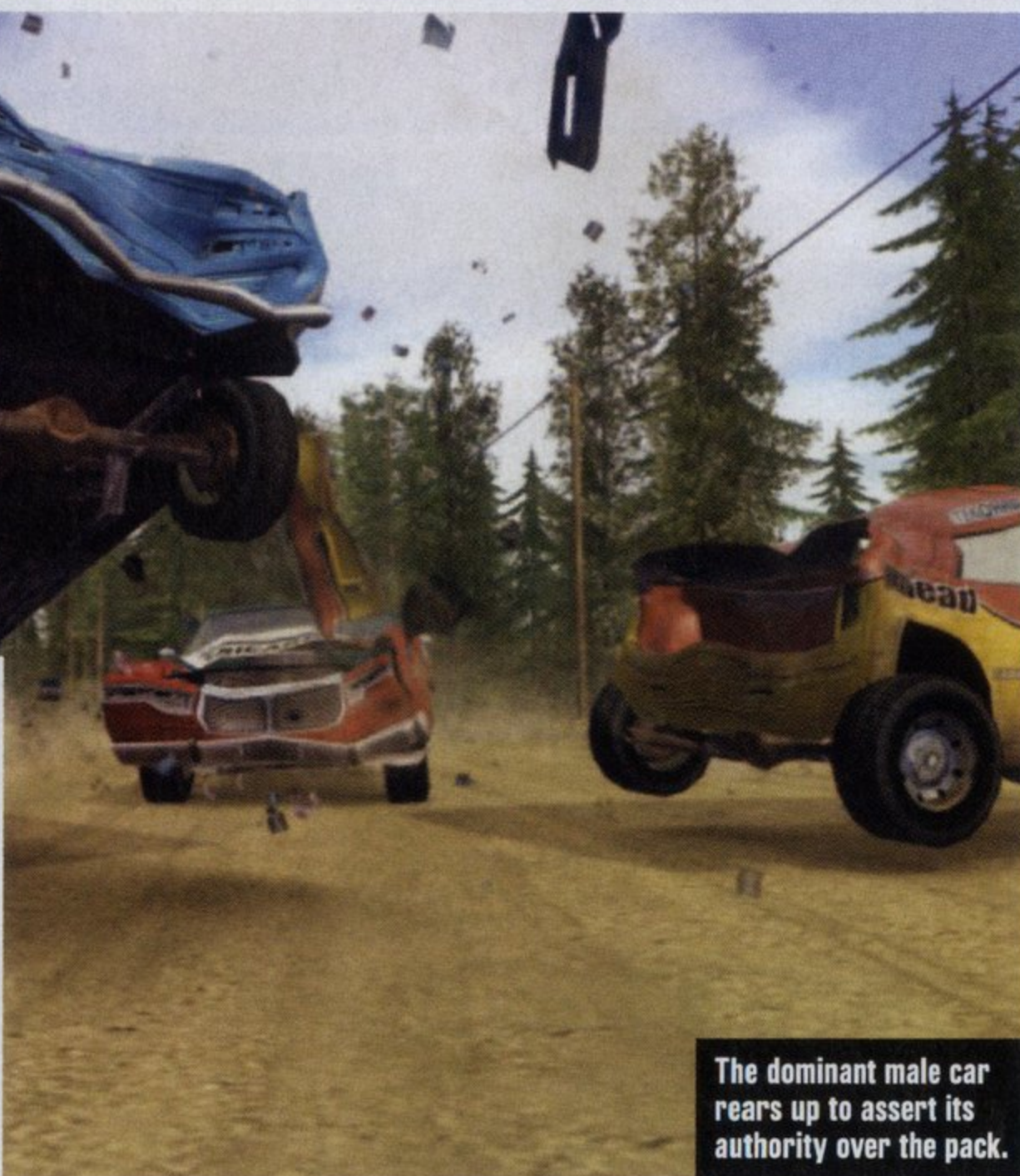
Damn that Topsy-Turvy bomb.



Just a scratch.



The dominant male car rears up to assert its authority over the pack.



## GET SHORTY

Each track will have its shortcuts, many of which involve seriously risking the shelflife of your vehicle in the cause of gaining a few seconds on your rivals. Look forward to taking an easy left, exploding through barn doors and sending chickens flying before tearing back onto the circuit in front of the perplexed race leader. It's no-rules rallying.

the-top act would end your race... Your engine will stall, your steering wheel will start to wobble, all your damage will impact on your handling, but you'll be able to carry on driving even though the car is wrecked."

Keeping the cars on the track and the race flowing is what it's all about, and that means, among other things, creating feuds between human and AI opponents as the races progress. Bugbear are working hard to create drivers that react as dynamically as the environment, bearing grudges and seeking revenge for your manoeuvre that forced them into the splintered mess of the fence back on the third lap. They're not obsessed with aggression however: despite the carnage, *FlatOut* is about reaching that finishing line and these guys will be going all out for

victory while still being prone to those inevitable driver errors.

"AI drivers will make mistakes," Alanenpaa tells us, "making them appear more realistic, more human. When an AI car is leading you and you can see him ahead, there's nothing like seeing him take a bump too fast and crash into the fences." We can see the attraction.

It's in the single-player career mode (see 'Careering Off') that you'll line up alongside your AI adversaries. The early prototype of this mode was story-driven, with a full third-person view allowing players to leave their cars and walk around the racing venues, wander into the garage to tinker around and even interact with other drivers in a virtual bar. These ideas were clearly a first attempt at adding some true innovation to the racing

genre, but they were soon tossed aside once it became clear that *FlatOut's* potential lay elsewhere.

"In the beginning we were toying with other aspects of a racing game," admits Jarvilehto. "Once we had the engine up and running it became obvious that interactivity between environments was the thing we wanted to focus on doing really well, instead of doing many things fairly well. We looked at the innovations made in first-person shooters and considered the possibilities of blending two different genres. But in the end *FlatOut* is a racing title and we decided not to include a story-driven plot."

Storylines may have been shelved then but the vision of drivers scrambling around the tracks clearly stayed with





Powerful, heavy cars may be tasty when things get rough...



...but they're hard to handle when comes to cornering.



Flying cars. Again.



And again.

## "FEUDS DEVELOP BETWEEN HUMAN AND AI OPPONENTS AS THE RACES PROGRESS."

Bugbear. It seems certain that this concept will be resurrected, at least for *FlatOut's* mini-game modes. More than just idle distractions, these will allow players to dip in and win cash to fund component and car upgrades for the career mode. The team aren't revealing exactly how these will pan out but they are already indicating that ragdoll physics will play a part.

"We're experimenting with ideas right now but suffice to say mini-games allow us to go nuts with the physics and add some truly innovative stuff. If you think about stunt tracks and then you add ragdoll drivers, you can get the idea behind the way we are heading."

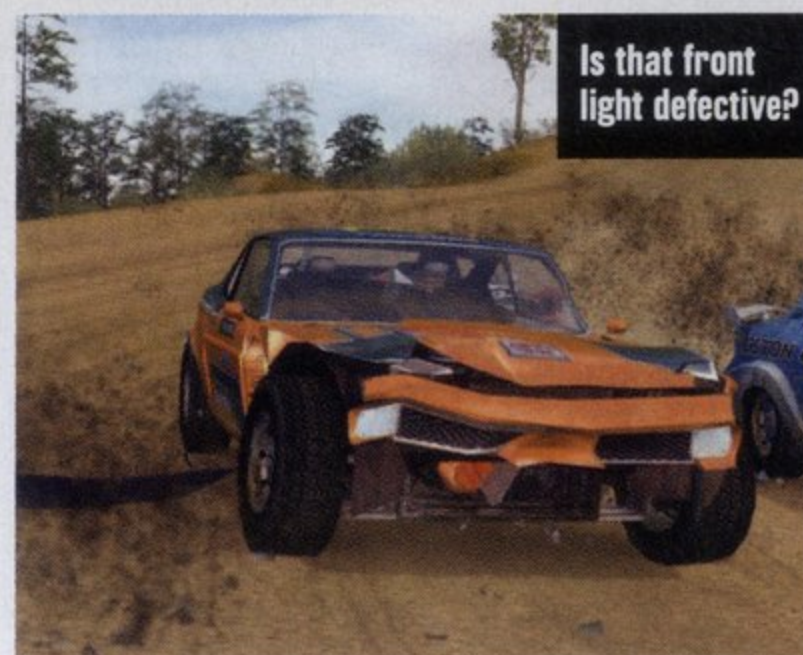
'Out through the windshield' would seem to be a safe bet. Certainly one long-jump style mini-game will have you

playing crash-test dummy, striving to fly the longest possible distance from your vehicle on impact.

All good, clean, tasteless fun, but it's surely during the violence of a proper race that such body-through-windshield effects will come into their own. It's not clear as yet how these will be implemented mid-race, although you can rule out any *Carmageddon*-like carnage, with Bugbear seemingly keen to get drivers back behind the wheel and back into the race.

"We want to keep the players racing," Alanenpaa confirms, "but what we do want to achieve with the ragdoll is that initial 'Oh my God' feeling that we think will be pretty powerful."

Flattening drivers flung from their cars is sure to be on the agenda when it



Is that front light defective?

comes to the game's multi-player modes, however, another item currently still on Bugbear's 'to do' list. Again they remain tight-lipped on the details, although we did get to sample Instant Race Mode with eight players, and other modes playable across a LAN or internet are planned.

As we've previously suggested, a last-man-standing demolition derby mode, played out on a variety of purpose-built tracks, seems inevitable. Bugbear will come clean on this soon enough, but for a game that blends destruction and speed so seamlessly that particular brand of rednecked mayhem is surely an opportunity too good to pass up. *FlatOut* might not be roadworthy quite yet, but it's already clear that this will be anything but just another racing game.

### TALKING IN CODE



We grabbed our Finnish A-Z and navigated for Bugbear's Mr Business, Aki Jarvilehto.

**PCGA:** Tell us more about the thinking that went into the courses.

What we're trying to do with *FlatOut* is to create open environments, open tracks where both the dynamic and physical layout of the tracks forces different kinds of choices from the players.

**PCGA:** Ragdoll physics in a racing sim: a crazy idea surely?

Once we decided we wanted to create a racing game where we really pushed the envelope with the physics and do something completely different, then ragdoll was something that we had to do.

**PCGA:** It's not just a gimmick then?

The ragdoll and dynamic environments will be integrated with the gameplay. We don't want them to be just pretty things, we want you to feel they influence the play.



# EVIL GENIUS

Those hollowed-out mountains don't run themselves, you know.

By **CRAIG PEARSON**



Your island fortress is vulnerable to Superagent attacks.



Hurt minions head to the med bay.



Looking good, Baron Samedi. Looking good.

## EVIL GENIUS AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Vivendi  
Universal

**Developer:**  
Elixir Studios

**Genre:**  
Management

**Estimated Minimum System:**  
PIII 800,  
GeForce 2

**Contact:**  
www.howevil  
areyou.com

**Release Date:**  
Spring 2004

**What's in it for you?**  
Gloriously silly management fun from the makers of *Republic*. In a genre full of serious sims, this rib-tickler has garish promise.

**IT'S** a wonder no-one thought of it before. Just thank the gaming gods for the folk at Elixir. They brought us *Republic*, and now they're toiling away in their secret lair to ensure we get to enjoy this: the game that lets you play Dr Evil, Auric Goldfinger and Dr No all rolled into one.

Yes, you're a wannabe supervillain, the sort Bond and his contemporaries battled by the dozen back in the '60s. It's up to you to build your base, manage it, and bring the world to its knees. Be the dom, and make the governments of the world your trembling subs. It's as gaudy as Uma Thurman's *Kill Bill* tracksuit.

The wider world is a malleable place, where you can use the paranoia that existed in the '60s to your advantage. For

example, you can hijack an American submarine and launch an attack on the USSR. A mini-war kicks off. Result: the number of agents the nations can send to your shores is reduced for a while. And that's just one of a whole raft of fun, twisted plays at your disposal.

You plan your execution of these evil deeds with that item no self-respecting supervillain would be without: the world domination map. From here, you can

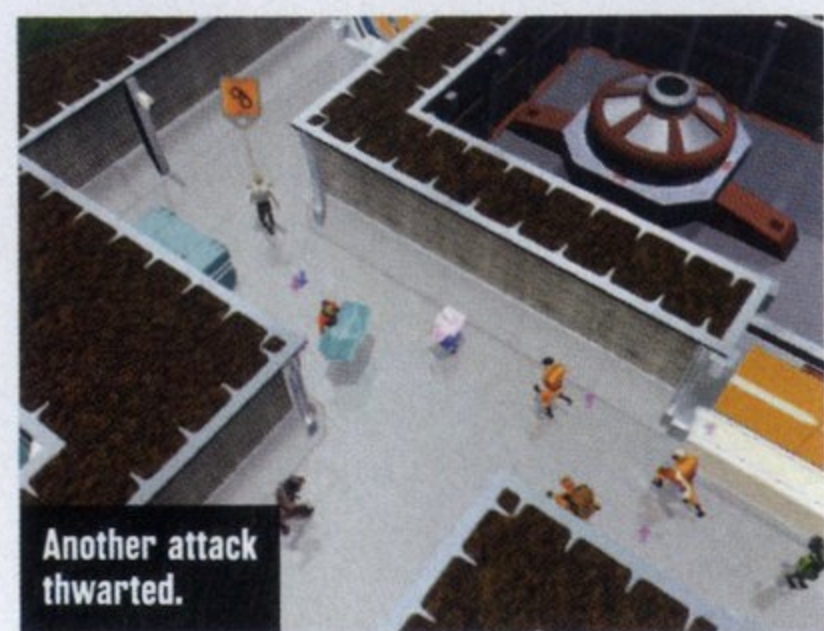
## "FRIGHTENING FENG SHUI INVOLVING TRAPDOORS AND GIANT FANS CAN BE SET UP..."

dispatch teams to one of five world territories. Each territory has four zones for you to attack with your brilliantly twisted schemes, which can vary from small stuff like stealing famous paintings to all-out military attacks. It all leads up to your ultimate goal of building, yes, a Doomsday Device.

As resident Evil Genius it's up to you to lead by example. The morale of your minions is very much linked to your actions, both in the world at large and at your base of operations. If your actions reap rewards, your underlings respond

with greater vigour and diligence. Steal the Eiffel Tower and bring it back to your lair, and the minions who see it gain a small boost, working harder and more happily. You also increase your notoriety, the rating system that measures just how evil you actually are. You can also inspire your workers in person: take a walk around the plant, and anyone caught in the glare of the Evil Genius will work harder. Fear is a great motivator.

During all this activity, day-to-day life at your secret base carries on more-or-less under its own steam: there's no tedious micromanagement needed. Scientist minions potter around the labs, experimenting with their glass thingamies and Bunsen burners. Guards take up positions where they're most needed. Even duties like cooking and cleaning are handled with the minimum of fuss. If they're tired, your minions will sleep; if they're hungry, they eat. Injured, they limp off to the med bay for a pick-me-up. The system feels especially refined after



Another attack thwarted.



## LUNCH AND LEARN

To keep your hands free for the more evil end of your business, you delegate jobs to your underlings. The many classes of minion can only learn their tasks by being taught, so you must set up a learning centre. Teachers then pass on their knowledge to their subordinates. Scientists can create lab rats, and your sharp-shooters can create gun-lovers. This is all done with a simple point and a click. There's no sub-selection. Tell one person to teach another and he'll pass on the best skill in his arsenal.



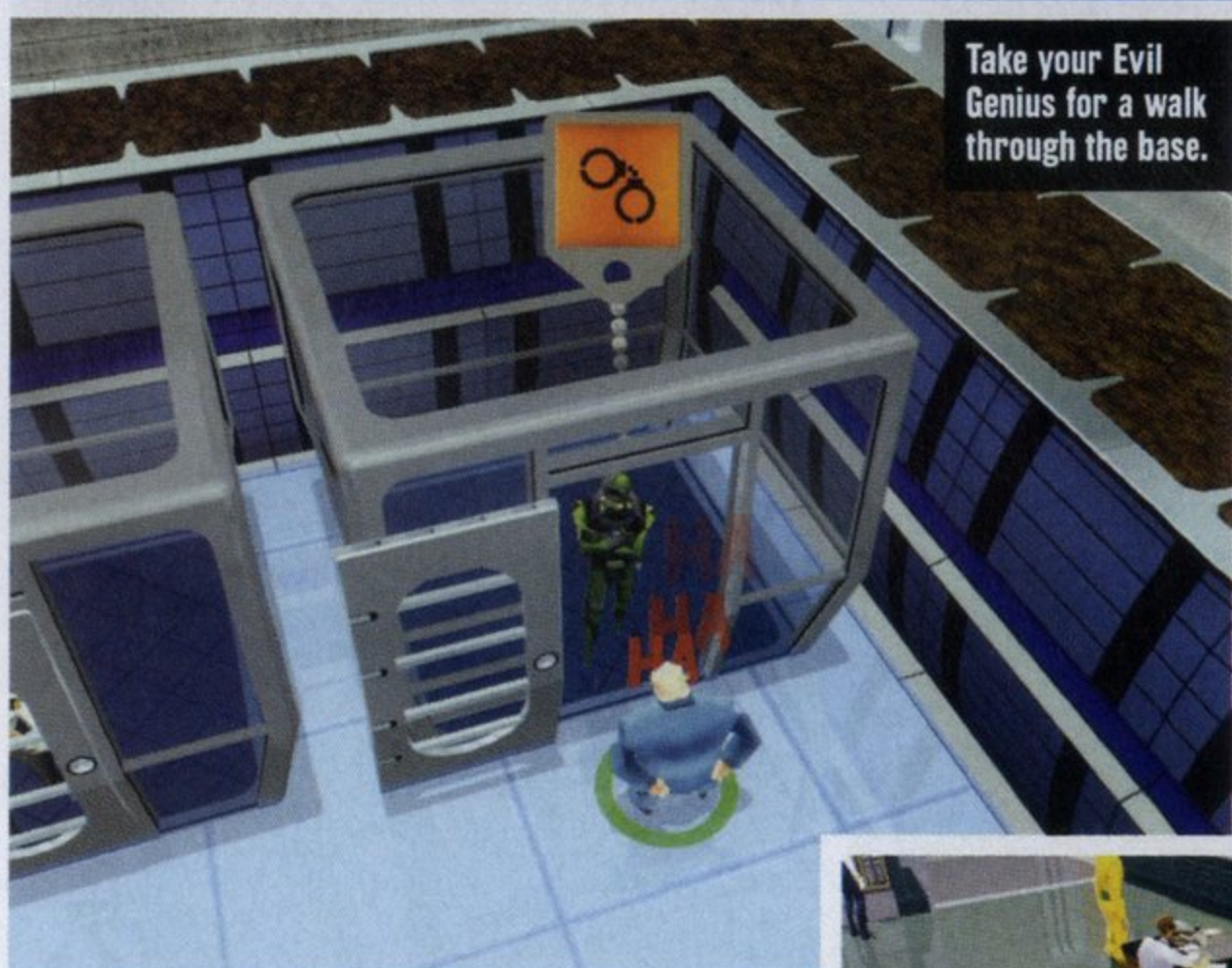
Experiment on corpses and they mutate into this.



An attacking agent outwits and out-fights your minions.



Take your Evil Genius for a walk through the base.



the unfortunate clutter of *Republic*, with only a few clicks required to set your deeds in motion. This of course leaves you free to plot, connive and contrive against the weakling governments of the world, to build and improve your base of operations, and in particular to take care of the steadily rising tide of secret agents attacking your hideout.

There is a number of ways to deal with these agents once they land on your island. Using your Henchmen as aggressive defence is an option, and each of these has a few special powers at his (or her) disposal. The ex-Russian agent can lob a few grenades, the wizened old granny can zap people. Aside from such human intervention, cunningly disguised traps are a must for any self-respecting Evil Genius. Frightening feng shui involving trapdoors and giant fans can be set up to automate the security of your base.

As aggressive as these tactics are, it takes something special to dispose of the super-agents. The Bond-style agent John Steele can only truly be defeated by



Laboratory research.

strapping him to a rocket and blasting it off into outer space.

Once captured, an agent is placed in the holding cells until you figure out what to do with him. Or, more likely, to him. So far our favourite option is simply to gloat over the locked-up fool, by sending the Genius down to stand in front of his cell and laugh at him. This brings its own problems, however, as it gives the agent fresh impetus to escape and report on your operations. Once he's free and safely back in his nation of origin, the secrets he's learnt about the layout of your base, not to mention your secret plan for world domination, can be used to mount a more serious attack against



Protect your base or fail!

you. Can he stop you achieving your ultimate ambition of creating and detonating a Doomsday Device?

Quite possibly. By the end of the game you'll be under attack from so many agents that your aim is not to keep them out, but simply to keep them away from your precious Device, which should be nearing completion. It's during these final seconds of countdown, with minions toppling over balconies, agents belting henchmen, and, we trust, lots of things exploding, that it all comes to a climax. The only question is, can you keep that agent away for long enough from that big 'Off' switch you rather short-sightedly built into your Doomsday Device?

## MISTAKES

The lessons learned during *Republic* are evident in *Evil Genius*. The game's much smaller scale and tighter focus are a sharp reminder of the first game's troubled gestation. But there are plans afoot to make *Evil Genius* part of a bigger game series. If it's successful we may get to see the flipside of this world, where you set up a spy-training facility.



# FREEDOM FORCE VS THE THIRD REICH

Why videogames aren't funny. And why the new *Freedom Force* will break the mould. **By TIM EDWARDS**



Comedy tanks. How we love the war.

## RETURNING HEROES

For this sequel, Irrational are bringing back the Astonishing Minuteman, the greatest of all American Patriots. Expect the delicious Alchemiss to make an expanded re-appearance, along with all the characters from the original. The technology behind the first *Freedom Force* was a bit of a stunner, using flat textures and lots of particle effects to create a lovely distinct look: this sequel builds on the same Gamebryo techniques for something even more special.



Henchman make for agreeable first fodder.



The Minuteman's legendary leap in action.

## FREEDOM FORCE AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
TBA

**Developer:**  
Irrational

**Genre:**  
Real-Time  
Strategy

**Estimated Minimum System:**  
P4 1GHz, 512Mb  
RAM, 64Mb 3D  
card

**Contact:**  
[www.irrational-games.com/](http://www.irrational-games.com/)

**Release Date:**  
Winter

**What's in it for you?**  
Men in spandex  
hitting each other.

**THIS** requires a certain assumed knowledge: *Freedom Force* was a game about superheroes hitting each other, breaking cities apart in the process. It was also extremely funny, so funny, and so stylish, that it just embarrassed its competitors. Since then, we've played nothing of its like. This raises questions.

Such as: why are PC games failing to tickle our funny bones? Ken Levine, Creative Director on *Freedom Force*, has an idea. "Videogames are not a subtle medium. A lot of products tend to go for very broad humour, very 'jokey' humour. Comedy is performance-based and finely tuned. Timing is critical. Given the open-ended nature of videogame play, you often don't know when or how a particular element is going to play out – which makes it tough to make it funny."

*Freedom Force* was different. "We walked a bit of tightrope," says Ken. "The characters are both heroic and they bring a smile to your face. Or such is the plan."

In *The Third Reich*, that band of almost-super heroes is facing off against Blitzkrieg,

## "DURING THE WAR COMIC BOOK CHARACTERS STARTED FIGHTING THE GERMANS AND JAPANESE."

an evil mastermind with amazing mental power, Rising Sun, Fortissimo and the jackbooted menace. But aren't the Nazis becoming something of a gaming cliché?

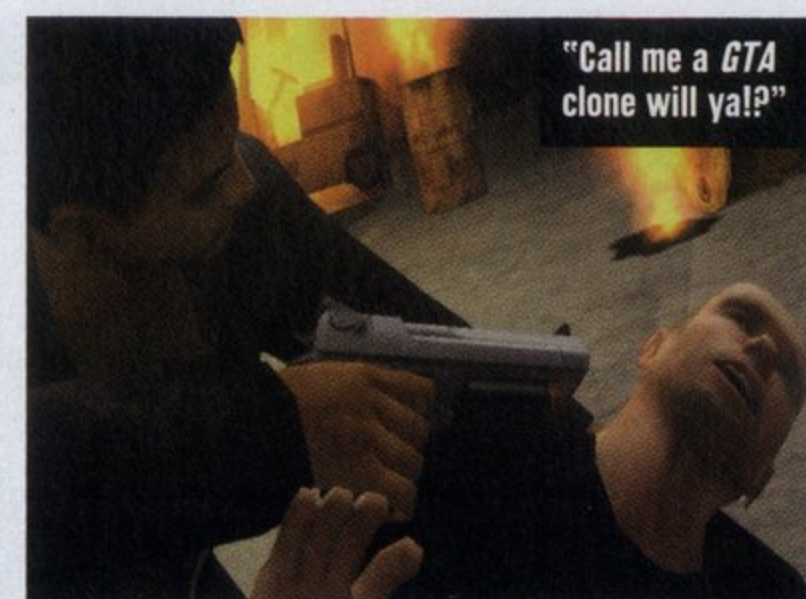
"Let me be frank," retorts Ken. "There were very few super-powered men in tights fighting at the Battle of the Bulge. We're not making *Schindler's List* here. While there have been a lot of games that simulate actual WWII history, this is the first game that simulates the history as told by comic books at the time. During the war, all the comic book characters stopped fighting Lex Luthor and The Penguin and started fighting the Germans and Japanese. It was a strange mixture of real world events and the sublimely ridiculous notion of Batman parachuting into occupied France."

And that's why we're so excited by this new outing for *Freedom Force*. It's a game that isn't afraid of its source material, playing it straight, aiming for something other than belly laughs. Was there ever a worry it wouldn't work out? "I was a bit nervous that people wouldn't 'get' the aesthetic of the original," replies Ken. "The game was not a parody, or a satire. A week before we shipped the first game, I woke up in the night and was struck by a bit of a panic attack. 'My God!' I thought. 'What have I done!?' I was terrified people wouldn't find it funny, think it was just stupid and goofy. I told my wife and she said something quite wise: 'Well, it's too late to worry about that now. Go back to bed.' And I did. And people seemed to like it."



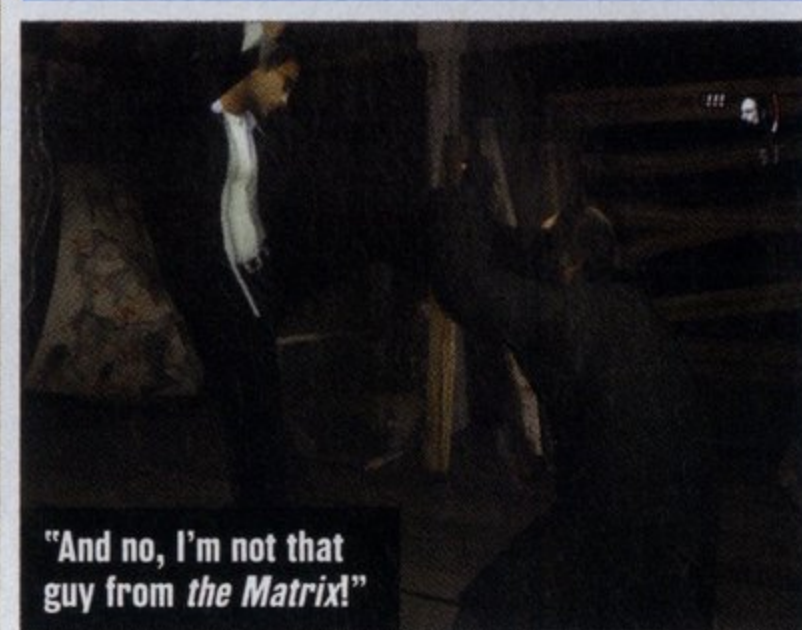
# TRUE CRIME STREETS OF LA

The only true crime here as far as we're concerned is making us wait six months for a PC release. **By DAN TOOSE**



## ARE YOU READY TO ROCK?

The console versions had a great soundtrack, provided you loved rap and hip-hop, as that was about all there was. Those of you that deem these genres to be a crime against music as an artform will be well pleased to know the PC version will include new rock and metal tracks from artists such as Alice in Chains, Queensryche and Static-X. Rock on!



**IT'S** common for us PC gamers to develop an understandable lack of interest for games that have been ported over from the console. Let's face it, often they are geared for a controller with two analogue control sticks, have relatively shabby visuals and rarely offer us anything new. Thus it's with much relief that we report that *True Crime: Streets of LA* is an exception to this rule on numerous fronts.

If *True Crime's* console origins have masked it from your radar, it's an action-based crime-sim that bears many similarities to *Grand Theft Auto Vice City*, but has enough differences and extra features avoid falling into the category of clone.

For starters, the player assumes the role of officer Nick Kang, an undercover cop with such a penchant for violent arrests that he's borderline vigilante. Developers Luxoflux went to considerable lengths to ensure the gunplay and hand-to-hand combat were far deeper than it was the *GTA* series. They've done this without taking away the whole car-jacking, er, we mean 'commandeering' side of things. With around 240 square miles of LA faithfully reproduced, driving is a major aspect of the game.

## "FIVE MODES ARE ON OFFER, EACH OF WHICH FOCUSES ON AN ASPECT OF THE MAIN ADVENTURE."

With six months to improve *True Crime* for a PC audience, Luxoflux have done far more than the customary option to run the game at a decent resolution.

Although it could be viewed as a little bit of a case of Activision cross promoting, there are now nine player skins to be unlocked, offering a range of 'Activision All-Star' characters to play as. Some of these such as Officer Dick from the *Tony Hawk* games are a logical inclusion, while the ninja Rikamaru seems a little more questionable, except when cracking skulls in melee combat. All of these skins will be available in both the branching single-player adventure and multi-player modes.

Which brings us to the major improvement over the console games that simply offered a soloist's romp through LA - multi-player. Five modes are on offer, each of which focuses on an aspect of the main adventure. Two modes revolve around

vehicles with 'The Chase' being a straight forward cops and robbers pursuit around LA, while 'Street Racing' is more of an out-and-out racing game. 'The Beat' is a competitive perp-bagging challenge, while the last two modes 'Dojo Master' and 'Battle Master' are contests of melee and gunplay respectively.

We commend Luxoflux for working this many new elements into the *True Crime* mix, although we're a little dubious as to how many people will be hanging around online waiting to play others in modes that feel like mini-games.

Still, with a keyboard/mouse control-system that works every bit as well as that found in *Max Payne 2* and *GTA: Vice City*, a heavily expanded soundtrack and the same star-studded single-player adventure, the imminent PC release looks all set to be the best version of *True Crime: Streets of LA* by a long shot.

## TRUE CRIME AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Activision

**Developer:**  
Luxoflux

**Genre:**  
Crime-sim

**Estimated  
Minimum  
System:**  
PIII 800MHz,  
128Mb, 32Mb  
DX9 3D card

**Contact:**  
www.activision.com

**Release Date:**  
Late May 2004

**What's in it  
for you?**  
An enhanced  
version of a  
game that was  
popular on  
console for a  
reason.



# JOINT OPERATIONS TYPHOON RISING

At last – it's the osteopathy sim you've been waiting for.

By AL BICKHAM



Crew-mounted weapons make river cruises a gas.



"I don't want to sound like a back-seat driver pal, but could you keep your eyes on the skies? Thanks."



## JOINT OPERATIONS AT A GLANCE

**Publisher:**  
Electronic Arts

**Developer:**  
Novalogic

**Genre:** Online  
shooter

**Estimated  
Minimum**

**System:**  
P4 1.4, 256Mb  
RAM, GeForce 3

**Contact:**  
www.nova  
logic.com

**Release Date:**  
May

**What's in it  
for you?**  
BF1942-style car-  
riage and top  
tactics.

**THERE'S** just one thing missing from *Joint Ops*: Wagner's *The Ride of The Valkyries*. Nothing else quite fits the bill as you and your team take a wing of troop-packed Blackhawks towards the LZ, crew-mounted weapons darkening the skies with a deluge of shell-cases.

*Joint Ops* wants to draw your attention away from two major players: *PlanetSide* and *Battlefield 1942*. This massively multi-player online shooter combines the best aspects of both: the instant hit of an FPS, a massive selection of vehicles, and vast maps littered with ammo dumps and spawn points that double as tactical objectives. The best way to see what it's all about is to install the demo, which you'll find nestling on this month's coverdisc.

Viewed objectively, the concept is simple enough: two teams scrap it out over territory. The numbers involved are impressive; up to 100 players can fight it out at once over Novaworld (Novalogic's server system), while home-hosted servers

**"...WEAPONS BARK ABOVE THE EERIE WHOOPS, CAWS AND CRICKET SONGS OF THE JUNGLE."**

can cope with 50 per game. And there's plenty of space to play in too, with maps that stretch over 64 square kilometres. But the aspect that has really whet our whistles is the variety of combat experiences any given game can offer.

A small map, for example, could host two compact teams of players fighting through dense Indonesian jungle. Such maps are criss-crossed with rivers, and feature villages as spawn/ammo resupply points. The element that characterises the experience is the terrain, however. When you're lying prone in your fatigues, the ground-level vegetation makes you almost invisible. We played a deeply intense two-on-two game across the office LAN in just this environment. Each player's radar highlights the direction from which sound

issues, so you occasionally get an idea of where your opponents are as their weapons bark above the eerie whoops, caws and cricket songs of the jungle. Stalking is the name of the game here. Think Barnes shooting Elias in *Platoon*.

Now contrast this to the heavy thunder of truly mobile warfare. The Pulau Jagung Islands map sees Indonesian and US forces battling it out between two islands, separated by some five miles of open water. There's a large number of boats to commandeer, from outboard-powered dinghies to large troop-carrying gunboats with rocket and machine-gun mounts, right up to vast ferries, capable of transporting Hummers, jeeps and APCs. On the air-mobile side, there's a selection of attack and transport choppers to strafe



Stealing an enemy vehicle is cheeky and fun, and never fails to elicit a round of w00ts when you fly it back to base.



Vegetation is your friend. Open ground, your enemy.

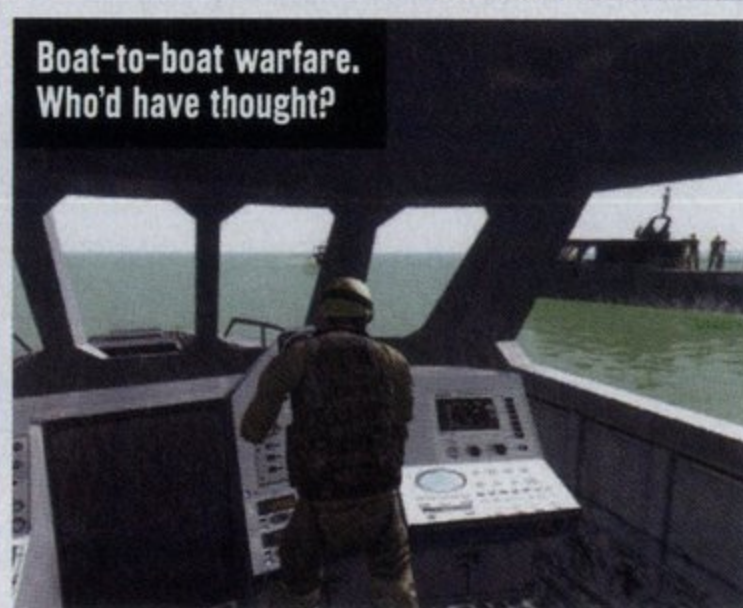


## COCKPIT CARNAGE

There are 29 vehicles to choose from and our exclusive demo features a goodly selection. Our favourite is the Little Bird – a light helicopter that comes in chaingun, rocket and troop-transport configurations. If it's major assaults you're building up to, then try sticking an APC or jeep in the back of a Chinook, load up with guys, and chopper it over to the enemy island. Factor in Black Hawks and gunboats strafing the coast and you've got an excellent recipe for mass assaults.



Boat-to-boat warfare. Who'd have thought?



The cockpit detail is a bit rudimentary.



enemy positions and get the troops to the hotspots. Factor in scores of players, and you've got a real war on your hands.

And the point of all this? To capture territory. The server can be configured with a number of different game types and victory conditions, and there's quite a choice. Set a map to the advance and secure game-type for example, and each team will have a series of spawn points under its control. These areas tend to boast vehicle pools as well, making them valuable strategic locations. To capture one of these, a team must outnumber its opponents within a certain radius of the strategic point. Once the point is captured, a friendly resupply and respawn point can be built there, thus creating a new front line for the invaders.

However, to promote tactical team-play, and to reduce the free-for-all chaos that might otherwise ensue, a team can

only capture strategic points in a certain order – basically, frontline points first. Any beyond these are deemed impenetrable until the outer bastions fall. It's a great idea, as it creates a rolling series of offensives, rather than a mucky great melee. Kind of like Onslaught in *UT2004* actually.

Graphically, it's looking quite decent, if not up to the standards of *Far Cry*. Few games are however, so perhaps we shouldn't hold that against it. The environments are lush and verdant, and the only real let-down is vehicle interiors, which are simple and blocky, with none of the subtle detail of the world outside. But then, you don't tend to look at the mantelpiece when you're stoking the fire, do you?

Another reason why *Joint Ops* should be an interesting prospect is the fact that Novalogic are aiming it squarely at the mod community. The game will ship

complete with a comprehensive toolset, including the designers' own game editor and *3D Studio Max* – basically, everything you need to build your own games with the engine. Indeed, Novalogic are hoping that modders will tickle it into exciting new incarnations, such as a Star Wars mod. Given the current level of polish in the vehicle and weapon attributes, we can see this posing no real problems at all to the committed.

Go play the demo, and see what you reckon. To be fair, it's no fun with bots, as they never deviate from their set patrol routines. But join a Novaworld server with other players and you'll get a good flavour of what's on the way. There's certainly enough in the one playable map on offer to keep you interested until the game is out, which should be around the time you're reading this.

## TALKING IN CODE



We quizzed Colonel Kilgore, of *Apocalypse Now* fame, about invasion tactics.

**PCGA:** What's the most important thing to remember, when you're establishing a beach-head? Charlie don't surf.

**PCGA:** Um, Right. Well let's move onto planning. If there's a single element that overrides all others when considering a seaborne invasion, what is it? What's the most important thing to you as a Colonel when you send the troops in?

I love the smell of Napalm in the morning. The smell, you know, that gasoline smell. Smells like... victory.

**PCGA:** Are you even listening to our questions, Colonel?

Kilgore: Whoa there, cupcake. I could rip out your heart with my bare hands, and eat it in front of you.

**PCGA:** [runs]



**LATE  
FOR  
WORK?**



**GOING TO  
SCHOOL?**



**WRC**  
**rally**  
**xs**

**10 Trailblazers**  
Our definitive list of cars that have shaped the WRC

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# REVIEWS

In which we put every new release to our panel of PC gaming experts.

## A Racy Little Number

V8SC2 is the king of this mountain of games

**A**nother month where a racing title is up amongst the highest scores. The original *V8 Supercars Race Driver* was a worthy performer but Codemasters' efforts in bettering that with the sequel have not been in vain. However, I think we can rest assured it won't actually be the last racing sim we see from the ever-reliable Codies. For its scope, attention to detail, array of options and variety of experience, it's clearly the game of the month.

A pleasant surprise for us was *Sacred*, which although about as original as a metal band wearing black t-shirts or a rap group covered in bling-bling, nailed the

formula nicely and has several of us acting like, well... PC games addicts. Go figure.

*Painkiller* was another very pleasant surprise. Playing the demos we've included on the cover discs really didn't excite us half as much as experiencing the full product. Had we more space this issue, it would have earned another page or two.

And the reason we had so little space? We've made an effort to cover a few games that we've missed due to being 'chockers' in the recent past. Curse those boys who bring you 6-8 page features. Curse them I say!

**ROSS ATHERTON**  
REVIEWS EDITOR

### THE PC GAMES ADDICT MACHINES

There's no point reviewing new games on old PCs, otherwise we wouldn't be doing them justice. After all, how can you tell how well a game runs until you've seen it on the best machine available?

That's why we've turned to Emagen. Not just because they're able to keep working with an up to date PC to put the games through their paces, but also due to the fact that we're certain that they do the best system assembly in the business. Look at the picture below and you won't find a stray ATA cable or screw out of place. If you're serious about assembling the best machine you can, you'd do well to contact Emagen.

#### THE PC GAMES ADDICT REVIEW MACHINE:

- AMD Athlon XP 3000+
- Asus A7N8X Deluxe
- Corsair TWINX 512MB PC3200
- 128MB Radeon 9800 Pro
- 19" Mitsubishi Flat CRT Monitor
- Western Digital WD800JB HDD
- 16X DVD, 52x24x52 CDRW
- Antec LanBoy Chassis
- Mitsubishi 104Key Black Keyboard
- Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer

**emagen**

[www.emagen.com.au](http://www.emagen.com.au)



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#### RIGHT TO REPLY

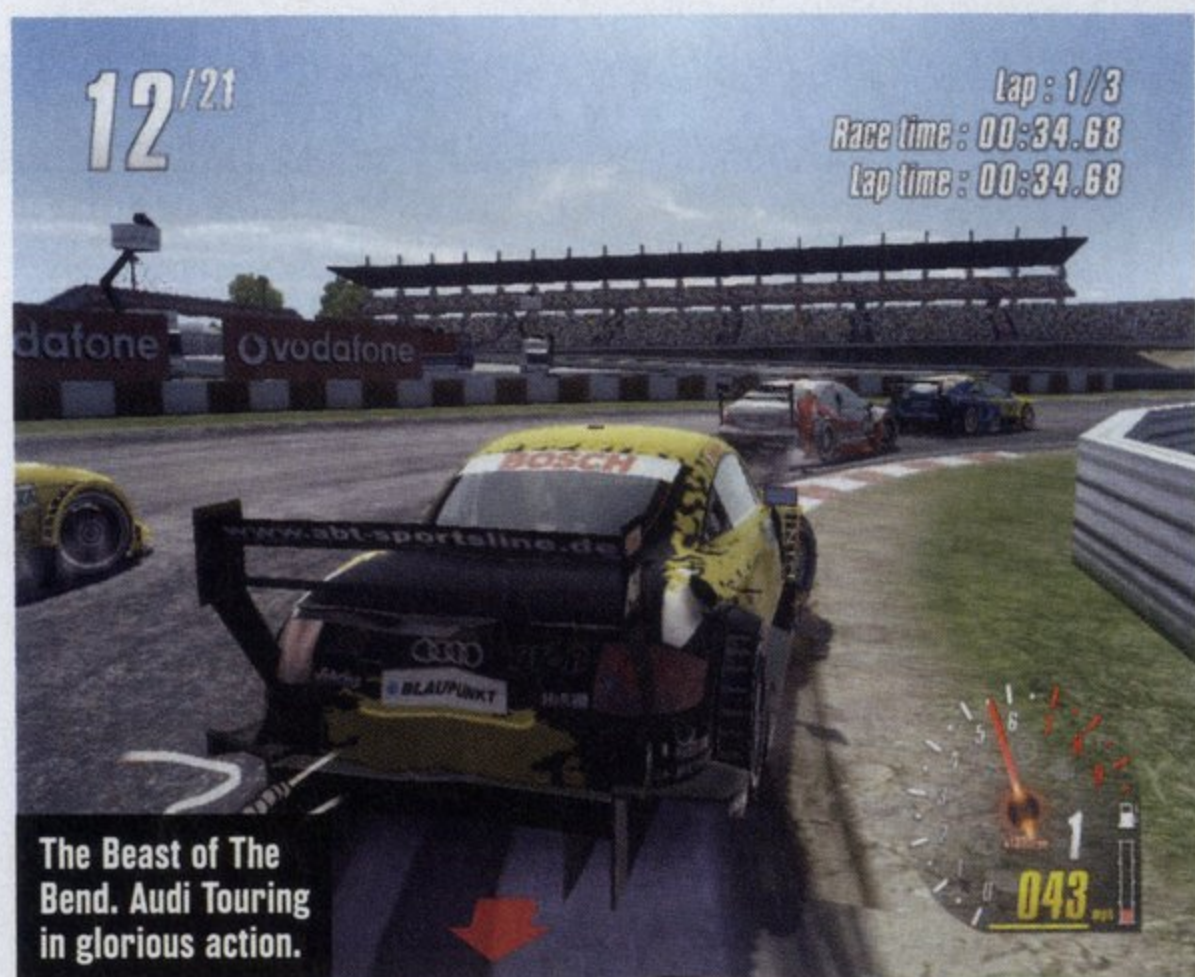
Think we've treated a game unfairly? Or perhaps we've gone too easy on a game. Address your redress to [pcga@derwenthoward.com.au](mailto:pcga@derwenthoward.com.au) or write to us via snail mail by sending your correspondence to Feedback, PC Games Addict, Derwent Howard, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355



GENRE: RACING

# V8 SUPERCARS 2

Racing games get back on track. Now all you need is the time to make a career of it...



## DOING THE SPLITS

Yes, *V8SC2* has split-screen multi-player. You don't see that much on PC these days, so it's a refreshing change. It was in the previous *V8SC* too, but this version is so much stronger. You'll want to get two USB game pads, or a pad and wheel. Or at least a pad, since whoever gets to use the keyboard will likely be at a disadvantage and grumble about it.

**LAST** issue we made a fuss of *V8 Supercars 2* with a four-page preview feature and, a realistic racing game is a lot like Nigel Mansell; you might like to see it perform occasionally, but you really wouldn't want to be stuck in a corner at a party with it. Its arcade racing brethren get all the neon colours and sexy power-ups, while simulations just talk about tyre pressures and adverse camber. But it doesn't have to be like that – *V8 Supercars 2*, like its recent predecessor, has shaved off its moustache and bought itself a trendy haircut. It's an interesting package, and no less high-performance for that.

The core of the *V8 Supercars* games is the career mode, in which a 'story' of sorts is told via a series of video clips, where your manager, and a small cast of other characters, act out various events that link the massive range of championship races. This is fairly well conceived and the acting not all that bad, despite desperate clichés and the

vaguely inhuman look of the rendered animations. The quality has reached the point where these look convincing without ever seeming real, and you start wondering when live action clips are going to come back into fashion. Either way, the banter between Dour Scottish Race Manager and Sassy American Agent Lady makes for an amusing distraction, and certainly helps to convince you as to how and why you're competing in such an unusual sequence of races across the world.

**"It's like heaven in the form of petrol fumes."**

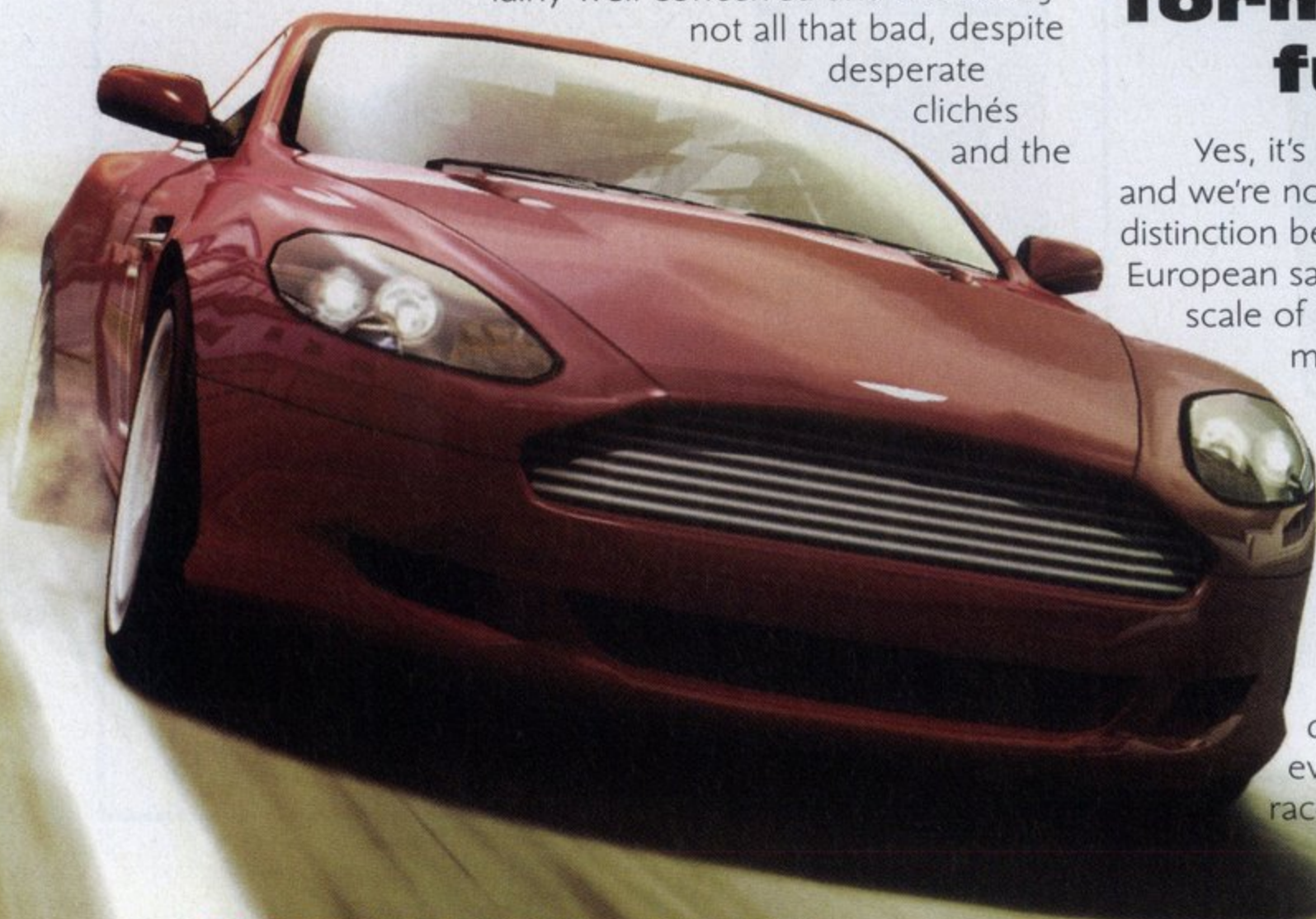
Yes, it's not all about Touring Cars, and we're not simply talking about the distinction between Australian, US and European saloon racing, either – the scale of *V8 Supercars 2* is genuinely multi-national, but pleasingly, it's also multi-discipline. Expect to be racing Aussie V8s, Aston Martins, souped-up Japanese saloons and even – and this threw us the first time it came up – Super Trucks. Yes, trucks.

There's a choice of two different championships at every juncture, and you can race heavy-duty units from an



articulated rig to the ludicrous American speedway trucks. Both are over-powered, completely silly and enormously entertaining. But that's only a fragment of the full range of racing possibilities: Formula Ford, Land Rover rallycross, light GT racing, grown up GT racing, German Touring Cars, 1930s-style Hot Rods, out-dated Grand Prix cars (no real F1), and a convertible series where you can race an AC Cobra. There is even (gasp!) some World Series-style rallying to contend with. All this in one game. It's like heaven in the form of petrol fumes.

The sheer range of racing types in *V8 Supercars 2* means that you'll take weeks to exhaust all the motoring challenges that lie ahead. Even if you achieve the objectives, and raise the cash in a series of races in each discipline, you'll still be faced with the niggling feeling that you didn't do as well as you could have, and you'll return to the extensive selection of free races to complete your training. Not only that, but the career mode will also open up





## A ROUND-UP OF REALLY RESPECTABLE RACING

Of the fifteen racing series on offer, some are more intense and fun than others - here's four of our favourites...



Well duh, the Aussie V8 Supercar series is out personal favourite. It's also the series of choice for the Codemasters team. Huzzah!



'GT Lights' may not sound so balsy, and they may look a little ludicrous to take onto the road, but boy do they slip around nicely.



Like ourselves, the Germans are not about to tolerate anything wussy, and the DTM is the continental series to look forward to.



The Vintage classic: Why? Because cars that but don't have modern suspension and braking technology are fun to drive.

They look like an alien's bathroom, but they're actually Land Rovers.



Lap : 1 / 3  
Race time : 00:09.30  
Lap time : 00:09.30



The internal view of most vehicles is really rather claustrophobic.



Grit flies, smoke billows, men laugh.



Lap : 1 / 2  
Race time : 00:41.11  
Lap time : 00:41.11



Formula Ford - F1's tiny cousin. Dangerous game.



Lap : 0 / 2  
Race time : 00:02.06  
Lap time : 00:02.06



some bonus modes for you to play once you've been successful in the tasks your manager and agent have set you. There is more content in *V8 Supercars 2* than there is in half a dozen normal racing games. Talk about value for your buck - this is actually enough to make you want to give back some of the modes, thinking that perhaps Codemasters have been a little over generous. Quite sure you don't need to hold something back for your next game, Codies?

*V8 Supercars 2* is a superbly designed and executed piece of gaming action. The tracks all look good, if not quite as stunning as we'd hoped, and the cars, particularly on a high-end machine, are wonderfully detailed. The much-vaunted damage engine makes things quite entertaining too, although it's certainly not as shrapnel-dodgingly cutting edge as we'd been lead to believe.

# Charged

The replays of good races really are worth watching, so that you catch some of the accelerated visuals that the game is capable of - something you'll miss if you just spend all your time behind the wheel.

But needless to say, it's that time behind the wheel that really matters, and this particular experience is excellent. Best is 'on the track cam', but all the views, bar the internal view, are eminently playable and infused with a genuine sense of speed. Even just using a keyboard the sense of precision control is palpable, and the balance between fun and playability has been successfully carried over from

the last game. As before, there's a real sense of difference in the handling of the various types of cars, and if you've been used to the front-wheel drive understeer of European road cars then you're going to go flying off the track at regular intervals when you're faced with powerful rear-wheel drive vehicles. Learning to curb your impulses and master a new vehicle is a genuine pleasure. Of course it's even more exhilarating with a force feedback wheel and we'll say this now: if you are into driving games and plan to spend more than a few dozen hours playing this, then go and buy a wheel.

continued over

### A FINE VINTAGE

There are old cars in here too. Not least the lovely Jaguar E-Type. The handling of this old but perfected beast is captured brilliantly within *V8 Supercars 2's* accessible racing dynamic. As with all the other cars in the game it looks fantastic and it's far cheaper than importing an E-type of your own.



Much gravel... Shame it's not a rally we're in.



Lap: 3/3  
Race time: 03:42:06  
Lap time: 00:29:58

## SOME MORE WACKY RACES

There's always the option to race something unusual and while it's not usually quite as satisfying a driving experience as bombing around in your mainstream motors, it's a hoot just the same.



Lap: 1/2  
Race time: 00:21:00  
Lap time: 00:21:00



Lap: 2/3  
Race time: 00:02:00  
Lap time: 00:02:00



Lap: 3/3  
Race time: 01:38:00  
Lap time: 01:38:00

Super-trucks. Huge, slow and unwieldy, these massive super-charged beasts make for Herculean racing fun.

The 1930's Hot Rod is a little bit on the silly side, but most amusing. All cars should have a flame effect bonnet.

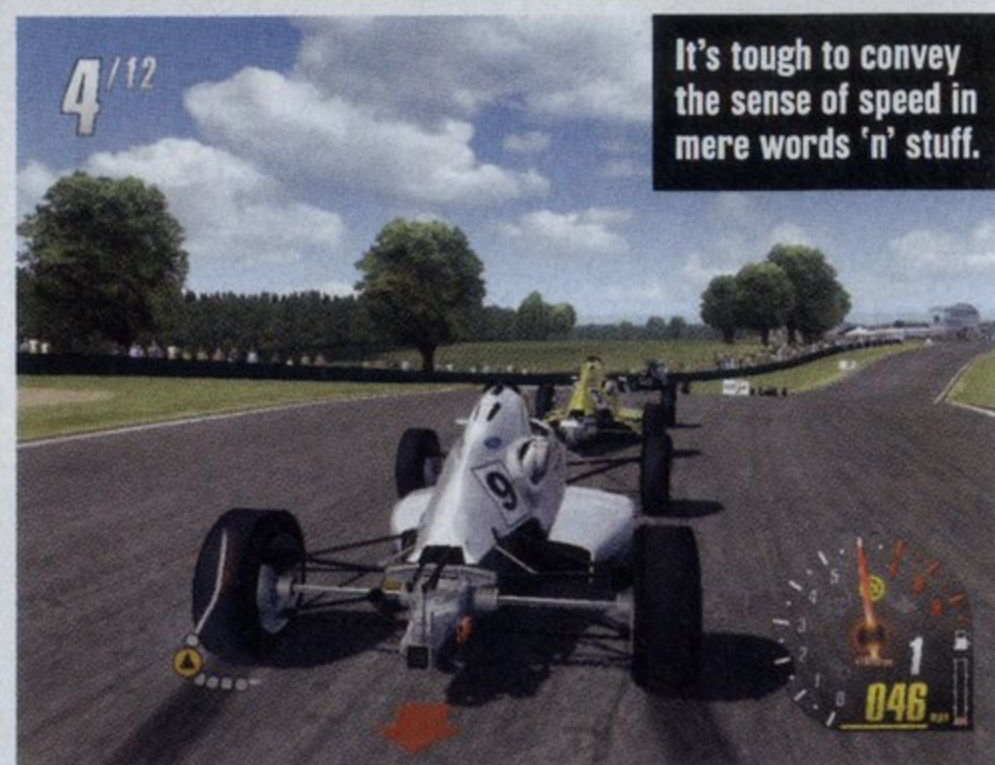
They handle like a nightmare, but look like a sci-fi dream. The new Land Rover 4x4s race at top speeds across mud.



Lap: 1/3  
Race time: 00:23:19  
Lap time: 00:23:19

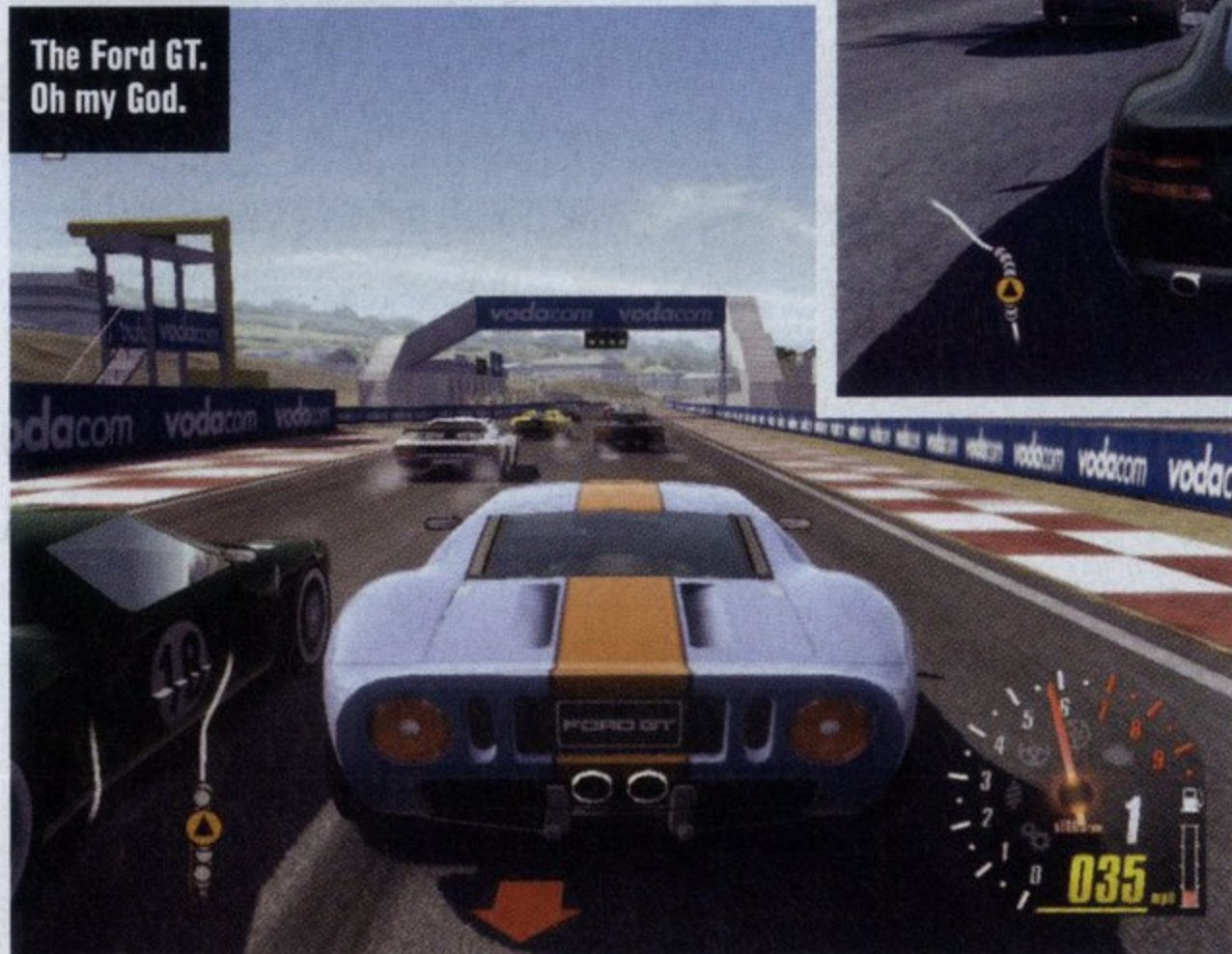


Lap: 1/3  
Race time: 00:20:03  
Lap time: 00:20:03



It's tough to convey the sense of speed in mere words 'n' stuff.

The Ford GT. Oh my God.

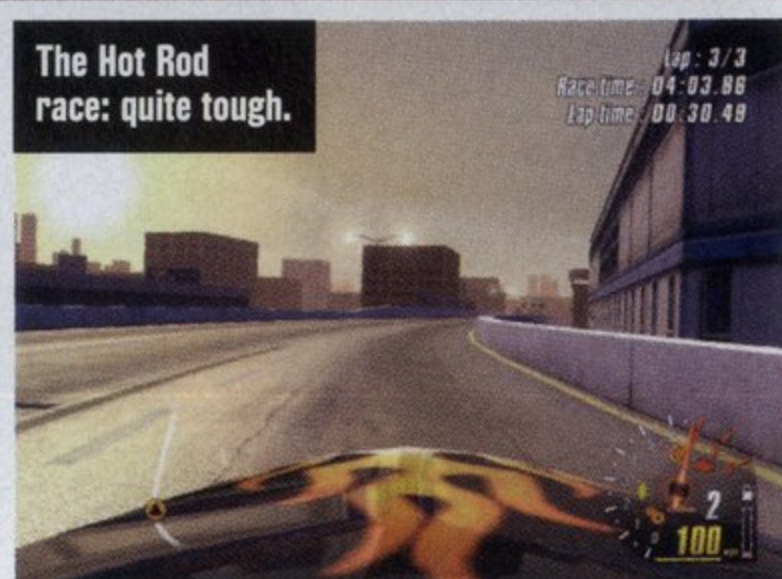


035



Like Duel, only with no cliffs.

The Hot Rod race: quite tough.



Lap: 3/3  
Race time: 04:03:00  
Lap time: 00:30:40

### TUNING FORK

There are two types of racer. He who fiddles and he who does not. Those who want to tune their set-up will be able to alter ride height, gear ratios, anti-roll mechanisms, tyres and suspension settings. This really does make a difference, although the default set-up is usually best. You have the option to test drive your choices after each set-up session, so you can get used to the changes and decide whether they were worthwhile.

They're very reasonable these days and it's possible to pick up something solid quite cheaply, especially second hand. The game supports automatic, manual and manual with clutch game modes, so all driving styles will be catered for. Confident wheel-owners will want to try the pro-simulation difficulty level, which really does ramp everything up and start to push your racing talents to the very edge.

Despite all this, *V8 Supercars 2* is never over-complicated: it's never going to please the *Grand Prix Legends* hardcore petrol-heads, simply due to the limited degree of realism in car set-up and handling. That said, you still have a chance to adjust and change a wide selection of options on the cars, although this setting is left off by default. We know a fair few boys and girls who will want to go searching for such tweaking madness, but in terms of immediacy, and for a pure and precise racing experience, it's hardly worth looking any further.

The *V8 Supercars 2* experience pretty much has something for everyone, catering for the great ovals of the American speedways, while still bringing us a dense range of those twisty European tracks we

love so dearly. In career mode the manager will offer a few hints as you blast around the course, and this gives you a sense of more going on than your own personal race, although we'd really love to see tips and chatter based around the individual courses and cars – the advice your manager has for you is taken from a fairly small vocabulary.

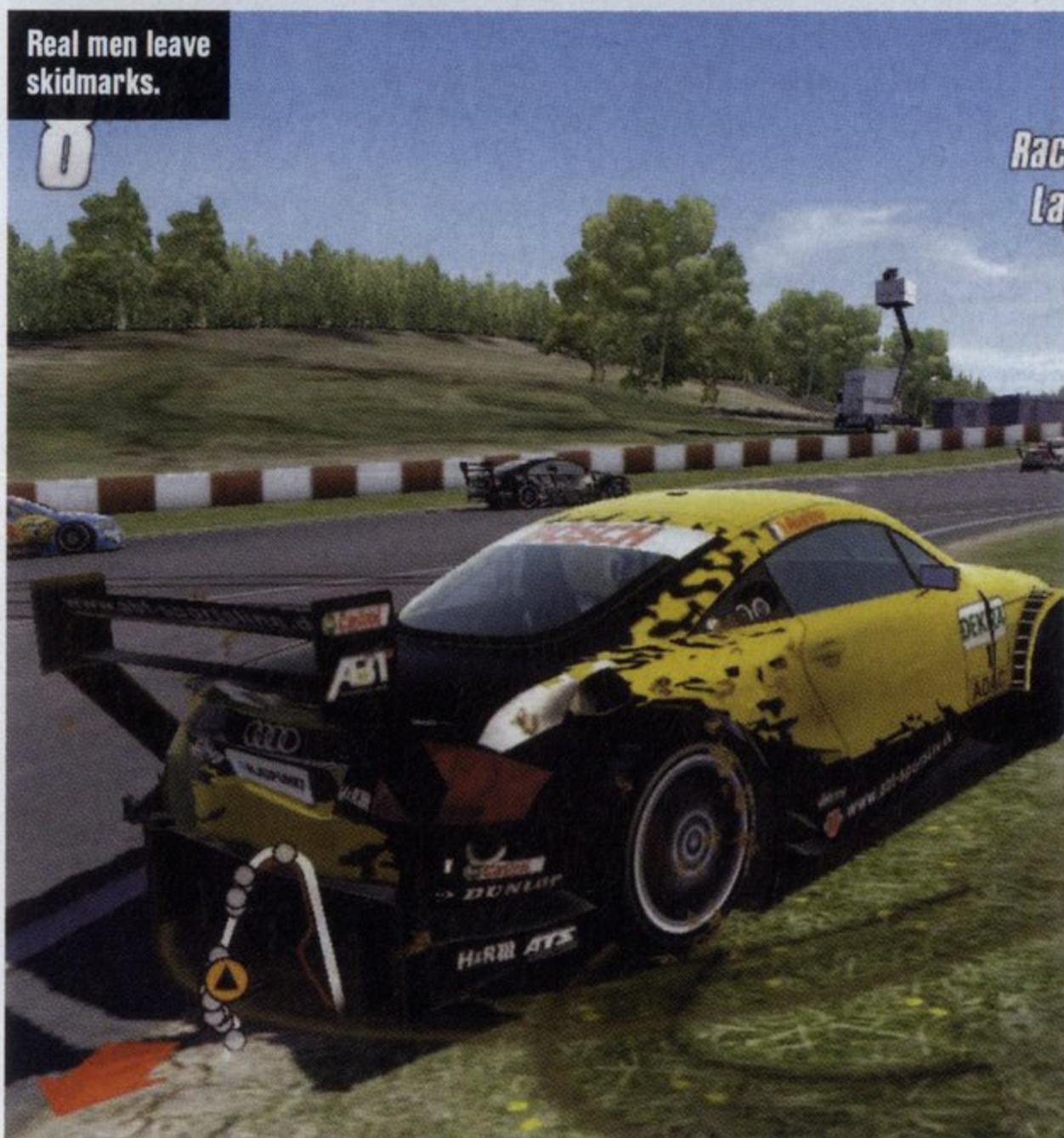
**"The best multi-player racing we've ever seen."**

But the thing we love most about this diversity is taking it online. Regular visitors to PCGA's deftly crafted pages will know that we're rather prone to jabbering on and on about the virtues of playing other human beings over the Internet or a network. And we're going to do that even more, right now: *V8 Supercars 2* offers the best multi-player racing we've ever seen. Easy to use, vastly comprehensive, it's just a dream come true.

You'll take Supertrucks online against what one suspects will be a largely Belgian and German fraternity of racers, and burn the streets with a Skyline – all taking on the racing skills of real people from across the world. The AI might be pretty good in the whole *V8 Supercars 2* series, but it's nothing compared to the grand satisfaction of playing other people. And there's so much to do it's simply breathtaking. Go online with *V8SC2* and you might never want to leave the house again. There's even hope for those poor lost souls who don't have internet access, in the form of a split-screen mode, so two of you can play on the same PC. This is clearly a Good Thing.

If there are any other niggles then it's that the career difficulty curve is occasionally misjudged. Rather than a smooth progression from easy through to tough races, you find yourself struggling suddenly at various points and playing the same tracks over and over to get those vital positions. This can become annoying in the later stages, when a messed up start in the grid or one slide off the track spells disaster and a quick race restart. Of course there has to be some difficulty in





## SYSTEM MISER

How V8 Supercars 2 will play on your PC

■ Supported resolutions: 640x480 to 1600x1200 ■ Scaleable options: Car detail, track detail, lighting effects, shadows

**VERDICT:** On a medium to high powered PC, V8 Supercars 2 runs like a gazelle-man wearing expensive trainers. It's really well-constructed and will guess with accuracy a slightly conservative set-up for your system, allowing you to pump up some of the settings and make it look even more lovely. You really want a GeForce 3 or better to be happy, though.



mastering the courses, but it can seem a little harsh in places.

Then there's the sound. It's a peculiar mix of the superb, and the not very good. All the impact and suspension noises are hard and convincing, but the various engine growls simply don't capture the throaty roar and vibration of the bigger motors. You can always tweak your system to make up for this, but that's as annoying as it is watching a movie with poorly engineered sound that has dialogue and music at levels too far apart.

Some purists won't be satisfied with this, least of all people who just want Touring Cars and in career mode you can't avoid driving lots of other vehicles. For racers who can't stand the Formula Ford driving physics it's going to be a bit of a chore to get through to the next championship. But we're willing to bet

they won't care once they've had a taste of driving in the Aussie V8 series, mastering Mount Panorama like Brocky, Skaife or any of the other racing legends that have got to spray a crowd with champagne at Bathurst: it's simply a brilliant driving experience.

**"You might never want to leave the house again."**

V8 Supercars 2 is, like its predecessor, taking this genre in exactly the right direction. It's entertaining and even surprising but for all that we'd like to see better in-car visuals, lots more voice-over commentary and an even more

advanced damage engine. With Codemasters making this kind of progress, we'd expect the V8 Supercars series to reach even greater heights over the next couple of years.

Ultimately, there may not be quite enough in V8 Supercars 2 to make you want it if you've already bought the original, but for people who've been out of the racing loop for a couple of years, or just want to see how good PC racing games have become, then this should be your first port of call. Diverse, clever and aggressive: this is just how we like our racers to be.

JIM ROSSIGNOL

## PCGA PROFILE

V8SC2 is:

- Big
- Balsy
- Brilliant

V8SC2 is not:

- All about V8s
- Sim heavy
- For lightweights

■ Publisher **Codemasters** ■ Developer **Codemasters** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 128Mb RAM, 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **P4 2GHz, 512Mb RAM, GeForce 3, Broadband** ■ Multi-Player **Splitscreen, LAN, Net, 8-player**  
 ■ Web Address **www.codemasters.co.uk/tocaracedriver2** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

### Grand Prix 4

About the only type of racing not covered by V8SC2 and Geoff's opus is still the king.

### Colin McRae Rally 04

Some of us just want to do off-road and, well, it really is done best by the Scotsman.

## PC GAMES

A step up from V8 Supercars, and near essential for the average racing fan.

**89%**



GENRE: FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

# PAINKILLER

It's about angels, not analgesics...



Here we see the alt-fire of the game's namesake, the Painkiller. Pulls enemies close and works like a buzzsaw up close!



Try telling this guy to pick on somebody his own size.

The ninja-star projector that doubles as a lightning gun. A true mix of precision and spray-and-pray!



## MULTIPLAYER

Despite being fast and quite good for a bit of pure DM, the other four multiplayer modes are neither original nor inspiring. One involves having to 'float' your target to damage them, another cycles everyone's weapons. Nothing a *UT2004* mutator couldn't better. It's not bad, just not a patch on its single player side.

## PCGA PROFILE

*Painkiller* is:

- Gory
- Frenetic
- Prime, pure Old-school cool

*Painkiller* is not:

- Boasting a plot
- Innovative multiplayer
- Very deep

**IF** you've become a fan of the story-driven variety of FPS such as *Far Cry*, *Half-Life* and the like, *Painkiller* will seem like a largely pointless game. Although the goth-horror plot progressively makes more sense the further the player goes through the game enemy AI is of the 'come charging at the player' variety, and the levels are essentially a linear set of rooms or areas that serve as a series of battlegrounds within a theme rather than an interesting place to explore

All of these things that would normally be biting criticisms that would warrant you skip to the next page, but *Painkiller* is not about a gripping story, tricky AI or any of the things that have slowly but surely become the modern day FPS feature checklist. This is a true old school shooter, with new school technology to power it. It'd be fair to say that it's much like *Serious Sam*, only less comical (unless you're truly macabre) and more polished.

Most polished are the visuals, powered by an original engine that incorporates the Havok physics routines. Those rag-doll effects work wonders in a game with undead nasties and demons - far more so than in games that pride themselves on realism.

# Sharp

Remember looking for all the secrets in *Doom*? That's yet another old-school idea brought back for *Painkiller*. Polish developers People Can Fly have expanded on that in a more inventive manner these sorts of challenges, by creating goals for each level

**"much like Serious Sam only less comical..."**

that if achieved grant the player a tarot card. Cards offer different powers (speed, extra damage, endurance, etc) which can be used in later levels as a one-shot means of getting by something that's proving just that little bit too hard. It also provides incentive to go and retry levels where you didn't earn a card.

Speaking of hard, the bosses in *Painkiller* come across as seriously tough combat puzzles. Until you can figure out what that monstrosity's weakness is, you'll run around feeling like a corpse waiting to happen. These are the most memorable, impressive FPS bosses to appear in a very long time. The only downside there is that they eventually make the endless waves of demonic nasties less memorable.

Only five weapons are available, but the alt-fire on each turns them into two very different weapons. There's no reloading, and weapon swap is unrealistically fast for instant gibbin' gratification.

This is a classic old school FPS, with memorable bosses, excellent graphics and more chances to throw yourself into the fray in one level than most games in this genre manage in their entirety.

DAN TOOSE

■ Publisher **QV Software** ■ Developer **People Can Fly** ■ Min System **PIII 1.5GHz, 384Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **1.8GHz CPU, 512Mb, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, Internet**  
 ■ Web Address **www.painkillergame.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

### Serious Sam

Much the same style of play, but a lot more comical and not half as visually satisfying

### BloodRayne

Another gory goth-themed game, but played from a third-person perspective.

## PCGAMES

A great run-and-gun romp for anyone seeking some classic old school FPS action.

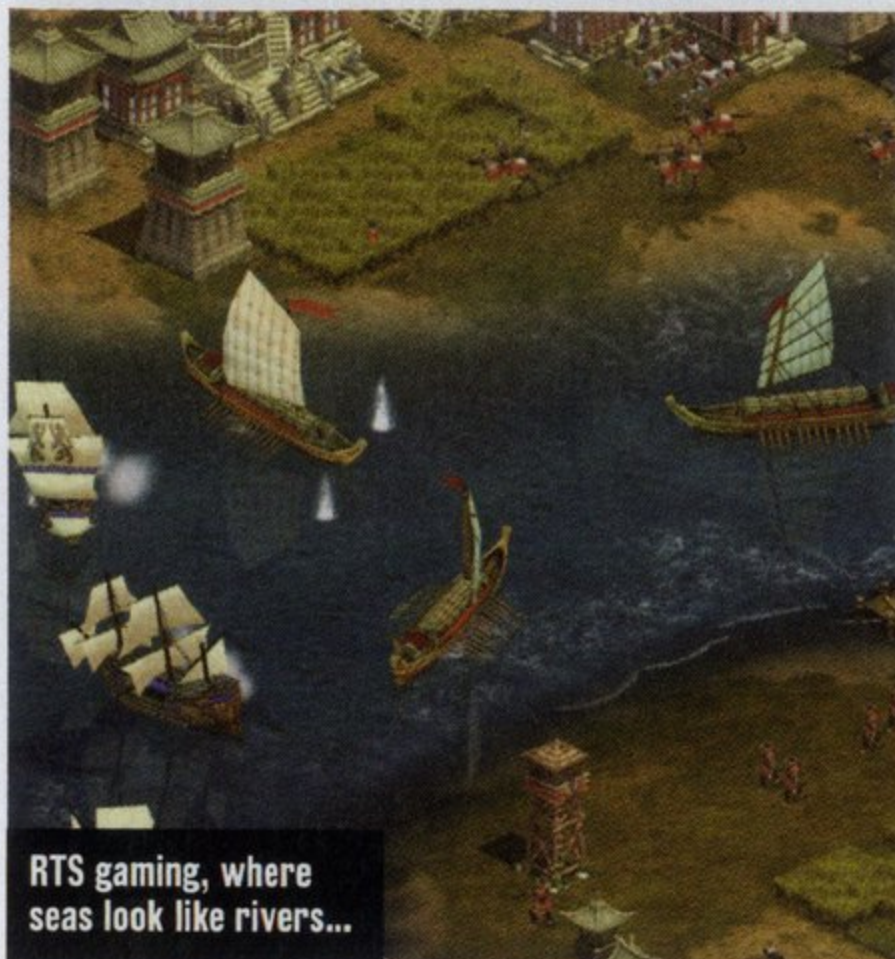
**85%**



GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

# RISE OF NATIONS THRONES & PATRIOTS

Glaring omissions get crushed beneath the weight of this pan-historic expansion.



RTS gaming, where seas look like rivers...



...and people invariably look like ants.



## RED-ALERT!

The Cold War campaign does a great job of mirroring US/Soviet rivalry as enacted through their proxy puppet states (Cuba, Australia, etc.). There's even a defcon rating – kill too many reds, and retaliatory nukes will wipe whole regions off the map. It's global thermal nuclear war without the need for SPF30,000+ sun-cream.

**ON** the surface it may have resembled a cheap cash-in; a game that set out to mimic the look and feel of Sid Meier's *Civilization* in a RTS. Concocted by refugees from Firaxis, it was spawned by the same designers who slaved under Sid to bring us *Civ II* and *Alpha Centauri*. Yet *Rise of Nations* rose to the occasion, mirroring and exceeding its inspiration in one vital area: *RoN* did not take all day to play. Global conflict from the Stone Age to the Starbucks Age could be squeezed into an hour, with rigorous tactics and economics to boot. It made other overreaching efforts (cough - *Empire Earth* - cough) look like garish pedantry by comparison.

If anything was missing, it was character. Sure, each civ looked different, and had sufficiently different units and bonuses to make for markedly different tactics. Yet the graphics were busy, intricate, aesthetically incompatible... and constantly surging and mutating as the tech tree progressed. The new sides in *T&P* are more self-aware in

## Rising

terms of these rule-based limitations. The Lakota, a native-American tribe, scoff at the expanding auto-borders that surround nations on the map. They don't build farms, and pillage any they win. They can build anywhere on unclaimed ground, and their borders are invisible to the enemy. This is a far more tangible take on a nomadic culture than the Mongols in *RoN*.

**"Yank fanciers are treated to a climactic wargasm..."**

On the other end of the scale are the Americans, perplexingly omitted from the original. As in *Civ III*, the Yanks are a 'race' that revel in the end-game, with strengths and bonuses that thrive in the Information Age. Their specialist units are stealthy, auto-entrenching Marines, and the ubiquitous Humvee, the jumbo-jeep of post-modern warfare. After an hour of beating back barbarians, Yank-fanciers are treated to a climactic wargasm as their bombers stream over the map.

The other newcomers allow for some logical new campaign modes. The addition

of the Persians and the Indians makes for an intriguing Alexander the Great romp. The caravan-happy Persians have got two capital cities – both must be conquered to win. If you feel compelled to build a war elephant (or ten), the Indians are the obvious choice.

With the Dutch and the Iroquois on board, the New World campaign has plenty of meat. Colonial powers battle for prestige, natives fight for preeminence, and the Americans, ultimately, for independence from the hated British. There are definite shades of Sid's *Colonization* here, only with less busy work and more logical rule-sets. The other campaigns relive the exploits of Napoleon and the Cold War – perennial favourites with the strategic studies crowd.

The other big innovation is the addition of governments – despotism, democracy, and so forth. Again, it's a homage, and again, it makes sense. With the Despot unit at the head of your army, conquering the Hun is that little bit easier. If busy-work appeals, then a pacifist regime with doubtless float your boat.

*Thrones & Patriots* isn't a revolution; rather it massages that little bit of extra tactical potential out of a robust game design. If *RoN* is still on your hard drive, then give it serious consideration.

JAMES COTTEE

## PCGA PROFILE

### T&P is:

- A solid expansion
- Hours of fun
- Civ in real time

### T&P is not:

- Genre-busting
- Turn-based
- Needlessly complicated

Insurance details. Right now, creep.



■ Publisher **Microsoft** ■ Developer **Big Huge Games** ■ Min System **PIII 500Mhz, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **PIII 1Ghz, 256Mb RAM, 64MB 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, Internet**  
 ■ Web Address **www.riseofnations.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Medieval: Total War**  
RTS with similar rules for combat formations, flanking, and RISK-like campaigns..

**Settlers of Catan (Board Game)**  
Simple yet addictive, and superficially resembles Civ.

**PC GAMES**

New rules, units, and sides – In short, more of the same for *RoN* fanatics.

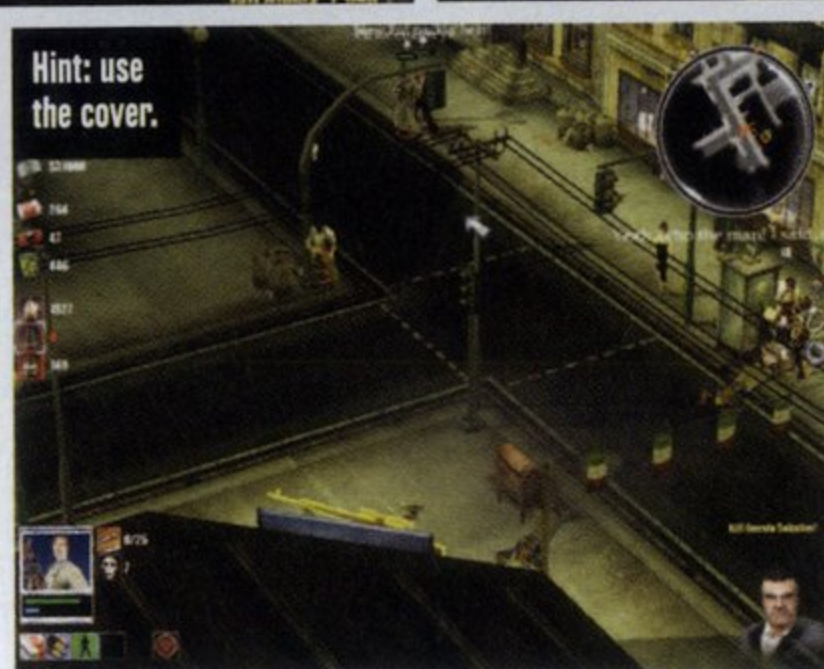
**80%**



GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

# GANGLAND

A Mars Bar and a can of Pepsi: now *that's* an offer I can't refuse.



## FOUR BROTHERS: FOR GLORY

*Gangland's* wafer-thin plot begins with three brothers, each making a new life for themselves in America, after murdering their fourth sibling. The fifth takes a vow of vengeance, tracking them across the Atlantic, to Paradise City. It's agreeable nonsense, fleshed out through briefings and the occasional potty-mouthed bits of voice acting.

**I'VE** been trying to pin this one down for some time. Haul it in for questioning, maybe rough it up a bit. Because *Gangland* doesn't try to sell itself within a certain genre. It's the kind of game that would put 'Worker' as its occupation on its passport. It wants to be the real-time strategy equivalent of the early, top-down *Grand Theft Auto* series... ish, but take that with a shrug, and a frown, and a little equivocation.

Which sends us back to first principles: *Gangland* is about running a crime empire. To do this, you can extort local concerns, offering protection to small businesses. Simply moving one of your units to a local shopkeeper and right-clicking will offer you a choice: extort or buy in. Extortion drips in a small amount of cash or resources, which goes on to fund your expanding gang. Locals, impressed by your good looks, charm and propensity for kneecapping troublemakers, will offer their services.

It's all about applying the right amount of force. To protect assets you can leave your goons on guard. To buy their way in to the business, your enemies will have to kill the occupants

and install their own hired muscle. It becomes a war of territory – hold the ground, expand and hire. That same model is applied to your other supplies – you capture and hold gunsmiths to provide a steady stream of ammunition and explosives, while hotels provide an income through the lucrative business of incriminating photos.

As you carve your bloody path up the social ladder, your avatar's strength and

**"Go here. Kill him. Leave a mutilated corpse."**

ability to take hits increases considerably. The same is true for your henchmen, although they tend to have a shorter shelf life. The average life expectancy of a newly hired gangster tends to be measured in minutes, not years.

This is a fine template. But *Gangland* isn't really about all that. Instead, the aforementioned ideas are melted down, sliced up, and served as discrete missions and challenges; snacks rather than a main course. You're not allowed to develop your own mob specialities – you're given terse objectives, distinct time limits and a rigid way to complete them. There's no

great master plan to form, no long-term strategic objectives. Just absurdly simple 30-minute missions that revolve around simple directives. Go here fast. Kill him. Leave a mutilated corpse.

This is inevitably a quite intimate game: you're placed in direct control of your minions. The missions feel closer to something like *Commandos*. You work along the streets, shooting up the opposition wherever they present themselves. The types of units offer some small scale tactical options: prostitutes, for instance, will spray their targets with a fine mist of perfume, rooting them to the spot. From then on, they're easy pickings for your assault troops, which include your own dynamite-lobbing character and the 25-stone 'Big Mama': a shotgun-wielding, apron-wearing octogenarian who's to be feared, and not just for her baked ziti.

The city is richly detailed. As you pan across the level, you can rotate the view and zoom in at will. The roofs of gambling dens, garages, hotels and brothels peel away, revealing the sordid underworld. You watch your men gazing wistfully at the hookers gyrating on podiums. You see the police, under your thumb, making deals, smartly patrolling the streets, with their arms folded behind their backs, pretending to be doing an honest job.





## EXTORT AND RETORT!

*Gangland* Business Class Number 7: How to extort your favourite uncle. You will need **1**. A heavy. **2**. A kindly uncle. Preferably a shopkeeper. **3**. Resolve. Drag Heavy 1 towards Shopkeeper 2 until Shopkeeper 2 whimpers and bends to your will.

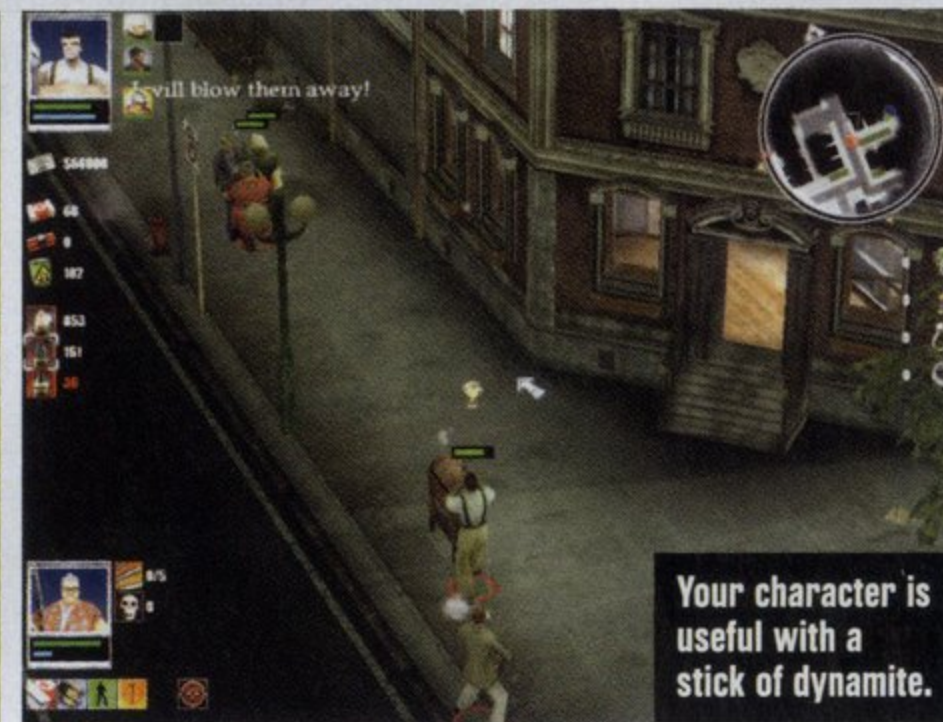
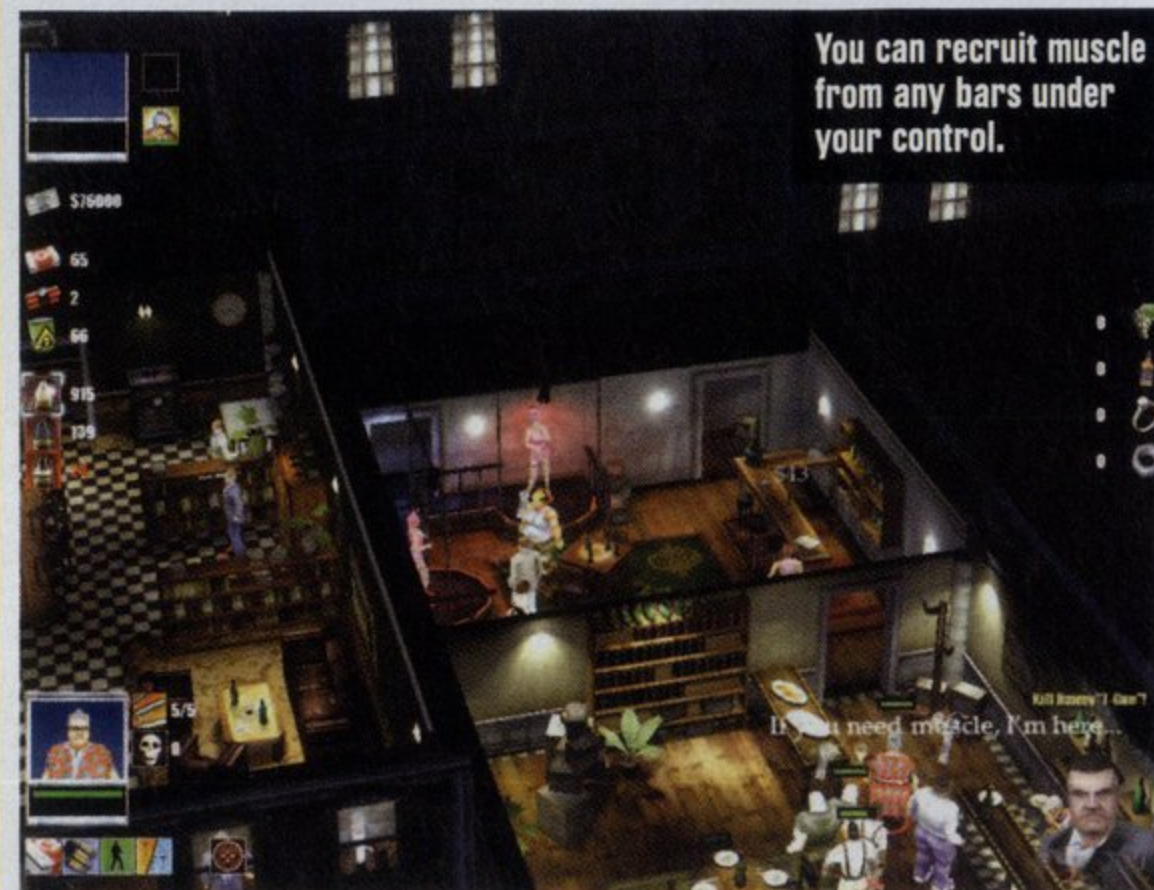


## SYSTEM MISER

How *Gangland* will play on your PC

- Supported resolutions: **800x600 to 1600x1200**
- Scaleable options: **Antialiasing, texture detail, more**

**VERDICT:** *Gangland* isn't a demanding game, but you will need some kind of 3D card: ATI or nVidia flavoured. There are enough options to get the game running on most specifications. The only problem you're likely to come across is swift camera movement, as you switch viewpoints and pan around your characters. Then, you might feel the occasional stutter.



But *Gangland* doesn't understand why *GTA* worked. Rather than offering a complete city to rule and bend to your iron whim, it separates its challenges into discrete, super-simplified missions, while allowing the larger world to continue in the background. Between escorting old ladies across the road and rescuing kitties, the city lives on, and you're allowed to wander around it freely, cooing at the silicone-enhanced dancing girls in the brothel and intimidating shopkeepers, but crucially, whatever expansion of your mob empire you might make isn't saved.

*GTA* had vehicles, and *Gangland* has included them as well. They're a disaster. Control is through the WASD keys, while you control targeting via the mouse cursor. An already unwieldy system is hampered by handling that appears to be

based around the antics of Torvill and Dean instead of Christopher Moltisanti. Cars slip and slide across the tarmac, rebounding off the kerbs, jolting back and forth. Their addition is slipshod and tacky – bolted onto the game without thought.

There are other – occasionally ludicrous – inconsistencies. Because the economic template is still functioning while you're chasing debtors or causing a ruckus elsewhere, you're still relying on the supply chain. This has not been terribly well thought-out: more than a couple of times, I found myself trapped in enemy territory, waiting for my stooges to refill the gang's ammunition dump, from where the bullets would be magically transported to the chambers and magazines of my team's guns. Sometimes this meant camping in a quiet

# Capo

spot and leaving the game running while I nipped out for tea and a biscuit, returning ready for action.

*Gangland* is confused. The small-scale, skirmish-led dynamic simply isn't interesting enough to recommend it. However, there is certainly room in the PC gaming Bolognese for something that takes the economic model and underlying principles and stretches them over a longer term. We're already looking forward to a much-improved *Gangland 2*.

TIM EDWARDS

## PCGA PROFILE

*Gangland* is:

- Real-time street warfare

- Violent

- Robert De Niro in *Analyze This*

*Gangland* is not:

- The Don

- A moll

- Robert De Niro in *Casino*

- Publisher **Red Ant** ■ Developer **Media Mobsters** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600, 128Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card**
- Recommended **P4 1.1GHz, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **16, LAN, internet**
- Web Address **www.whiptailinteractive.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

### Gangsters 2

A similarly flawed attempt to do mob justice. Now available on budget for a fiver.

### Mafia

The nearest fully-3D equivalent. Story-led, gloriously cinematic, with fantastic cars.

**PC GAMES ADDICT**  
We're still awaiting the real gangster's paradise. Take your violin case elsewhere.

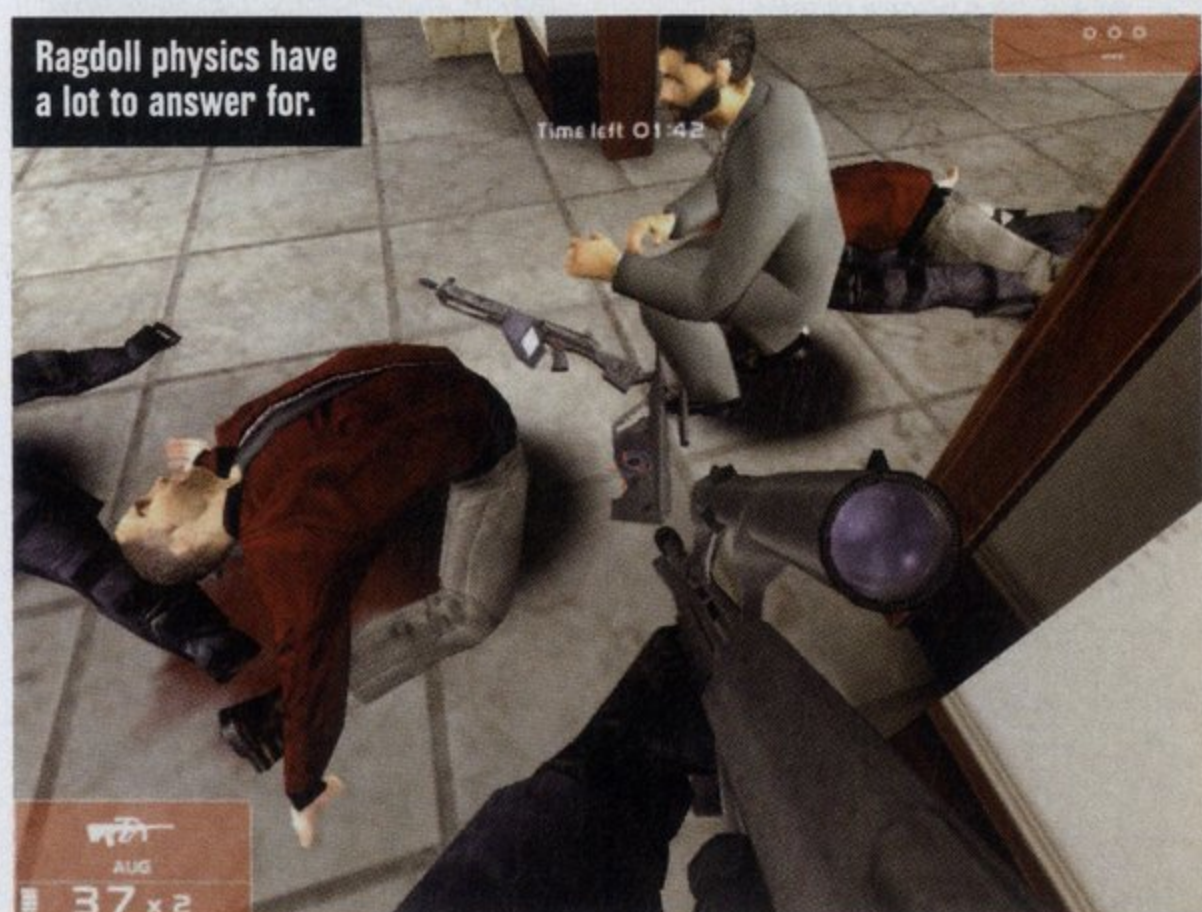
**62%**



GENRE: TACTICAL SHOOTER

# RAINBOW SIX RAVEN SHIELD ATHENA SWORD

And you thought they just sold posters and picture frames.



## LONE WOLF

Besides the campaign and multi-player modes, there's a custom mission mode, which is the perfect bite-sized gaming morsel when you don't have time for a long session. You can set up full team games if you wish, but we prefer the Lone Wolf mode, where you take a single operative into hostile territory. Crank up the difficulty, crack out the night-vision goggles, and stalk to your heart's content. Oh yes.

**THERE** must be a Tom Clancy sequel name-generator out there somewhere. Every now and then it clicks, whirrs, and spits out a piece of ticker tape inscribed with a couple of seemingly unrelated words. *Rogue Spear*. *Ghost Recon*. *Ruptured Ferret*, etc.

And much as this naming convention is wearing thin, the game experience itself is getting decidedly past its prime. It's special forces against the terrorists yet again, with bullets that really hurt and scenery that hides the bad guys well enough for the game to be challenging. Stop me if you've heard this one before.

There's a distinct feeling of flatness to *Athena Sword*. The AI is as unimaginative as the game itself: no purposeful hunting of the player here. AI enemies walk their pre-set routes and take shots if they see you, and most of the time they don't even pursue or run back to their buddies to raise the alarm. The result is a game in which the enemies feel like a bunch of bots rather than thinking creatures, which is a massive illusion-breaker. From mission to mission, you simply take each firefight as it comes, while

# Blunt

never really coming under concerted pressure from the enemy. Failure comes when you're shot by a bad guy you just don't see, leading to repeated attempts where you get a bit closer to success every time. Not because you're being mentally

**"Stop me if you've heard this one before."**

challenged, but because you're learning the best route and the exact locations of the dangers it holds.

There's a similar lack of creativity to the mission concepts, where you kill terrorists and save hostages time and again. There's no life or excitement to it, and the admittedly decent engine and pleasing graphics don't make up for the lack of vibrancy in the content department. And while we're talking technical, the engine

definitely has a feel of spit-and-polish about it, with stout visuals and decent (if not cutting-edge) texture work. Gunplay is slick, with a nice mixture of precision and fully automatic weapons that balance against your troops' accuracy to give you an overall sense of ability (or handicap, depending on the operative you're using). The only real let-down is the pseudo-ragdoll style of the models. Shoot a terrorist and he'll tumble like a bag of spuds, but as soon as he's still, he becomes nothing more than a corpse-shaped decal – immobile and no longer part of the world you can interact with.

In short, this is a bit of a lazy sequel. All the good old *Rainbow Six* stuff is there – mission planning, troop selection and the need for a tactical approach, but there's not enough zing to keep you playing. Unless, of course, you love *Rainbow Six*, and relish new missions regardless of how stale they are. But most of us are looking for something a little sharper, if you'll pardon the pun.

AL BICKHAM

## PCGA PROFILE

*Athena Sword* is:

■ More of the same

■ Technically sound

■ Lacking in pizzazz

*Athena Sword* is not:

■ Bad

■ Original

■ Compelling

Remember this embassy from *Rainbow Six*? It's a trip down memory lane.



■ Publisher **Ubi Soft** ■ Developer **Red Storm** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **P4 2GHz, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 16 players**  
 ■ Web Address **www.raven-shield.com/athenasword** ■ Release Date **Out now**

ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**CS: Condition Zero**  
*Counter-Strike* gets hot bots, and blasts its way into your single-player affections.

**BHD: Team Sabre**  
 The *Black Hawk Down* boys get a makeover, but it's best in multi-player.

**PC GAMES**  
 It works, but it still feels like the *Rainbow* gang are retreading old ground.

**69%**



GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

# DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS

Try your hand at being Monty's double, and give that Rommel his just deserts.



Combine airstrikes with ground attacks for blitzkrieg fun.



Lumme! Scenes like this are commonplace.

**HOW** come a sense of romanticism gets attached to war? Think about the Africa campaign, with staunch plan-meister Monty and his dashing opponent Rommel – 'The Desert Fox'. The reality was a bunch of squaddies in a dreadfully harsh environment, enduring bad food, the horrors of war and of course, permanently gritty briefs. It's about as romantic as a dirty weekend in Kings Cross.

Thankfully, *DRvAK* melds fact and fiction with aplomb. As the commander of either British (Desert Rats) or German (Afrika Korps) forces, it's your task to help turn the tide of the battle through a series of missions. We're seeing fewer and fewer resource-driven RTS games these days, and Digital Reality have followed suit: while each of *DRvAK*'s missions allows you to choose your units from a list (and to a budget), there's no resource management as such – nothing to mine, harvest or hoard. The list of available units you can take into each mission increases as the campaign progresses, and you can also net new units by doing well. If you fulfil secondary as well as primary mission objectives, you're awarded with prestige points, which unlock special units such as speedy scout jeeps and ultra-tough tanks.

There are campaigns for both armies, each with their own requisite units and missions, ranging from infantry-only

## Gritty

skirmishes to full-blown tank actions. One of the most compelling features of the game is that your infantry can man abandoned vehicles, which means you can bolster your forces as you go through a mission – you'll often come across parked tanks and trucks. Each army also boasts a hero unit, who can be ordered

**"There's a lot of game in here, and it's pretty, too."**

to enter vehicles. This has the effect of bolstering the general combat abilities of a vehicle and its crew, such as visual range and firing speed, meaning you can put a bit more punch where it's needed.

There's a lot of game in here, and it's pretty, too. With all the graphical variables turned up to 11, it's a lovely sight; tanks rock on their chassis, and shudder convincingly as they take shell-fire. Also,

the level of zoom on offer is impressive, allowing you to watch individual men clutch melodramatically at their hearts and drop to the floor when they take a slug. However, the camera's a bit of a pain, as the tilt function just doesn't let you hunker down to a tank's eye view and see what's on the horizon; the result is a sensation of narrow and restricted vision. Also, when you select a group and order it to move, there are often a couple of units that don't heed the bugle, and stay stock still. And finally, while the visuals are very pleasing, the game's environments will brown you out after a while, through the relentless use of desert terrain.

Otherwise, it's a good romp: fun to play, challenging, and featuring a surprising level of detail – there are plenty of real-world vehicles, and you can order units to fire at specific parts of enemy tanks, such as tracks or turrets. Beyond the finer details, Just don't expect a particularly groundbreaking RTS, and you'll enjoy it for the tactical sandpit it offers.

AL BICKHAM

### BLITZKRIEG!

Playing through the campaigns, you'll eventually unlock Blitzkrieg mode. This is a slightly tougher version of the normal game, in that you start each mission only with repaired versions of any units you had left over from the previous mission. It's challenging, but helps tie the missions together into a meaningful campaign. Good stuff. Carry on.

### PCGA PROFILE

**DRvAK is:**

- Pretty
- Punchy
- Brown

**DRvAK is not:**

- Issue-free
- Resource-full
- Colourful

■ Publisher **QV Software** ■ Developer **Digital Reality** ■ Minimum System **PIII 900, 256Mb RAM, DX 9 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **P4 2GHz, 512Mb RAM, Radeon 9600/GeForce 4** ■ Multi-Player **Internet, LAN, up to 4 players**  
 ■ Web Address **www.desertratsgame.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

### ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Ground Control**  
Resource-free RTS done brilliantly. Still holds up today.

**C&C: Generals**  
Follows the standard resource model, but very much the watermark for modern RTS.

### PC GAMES ADDICT

A pleasing take on North Africa, but more pop-tactics than deep strategy.

**79%**



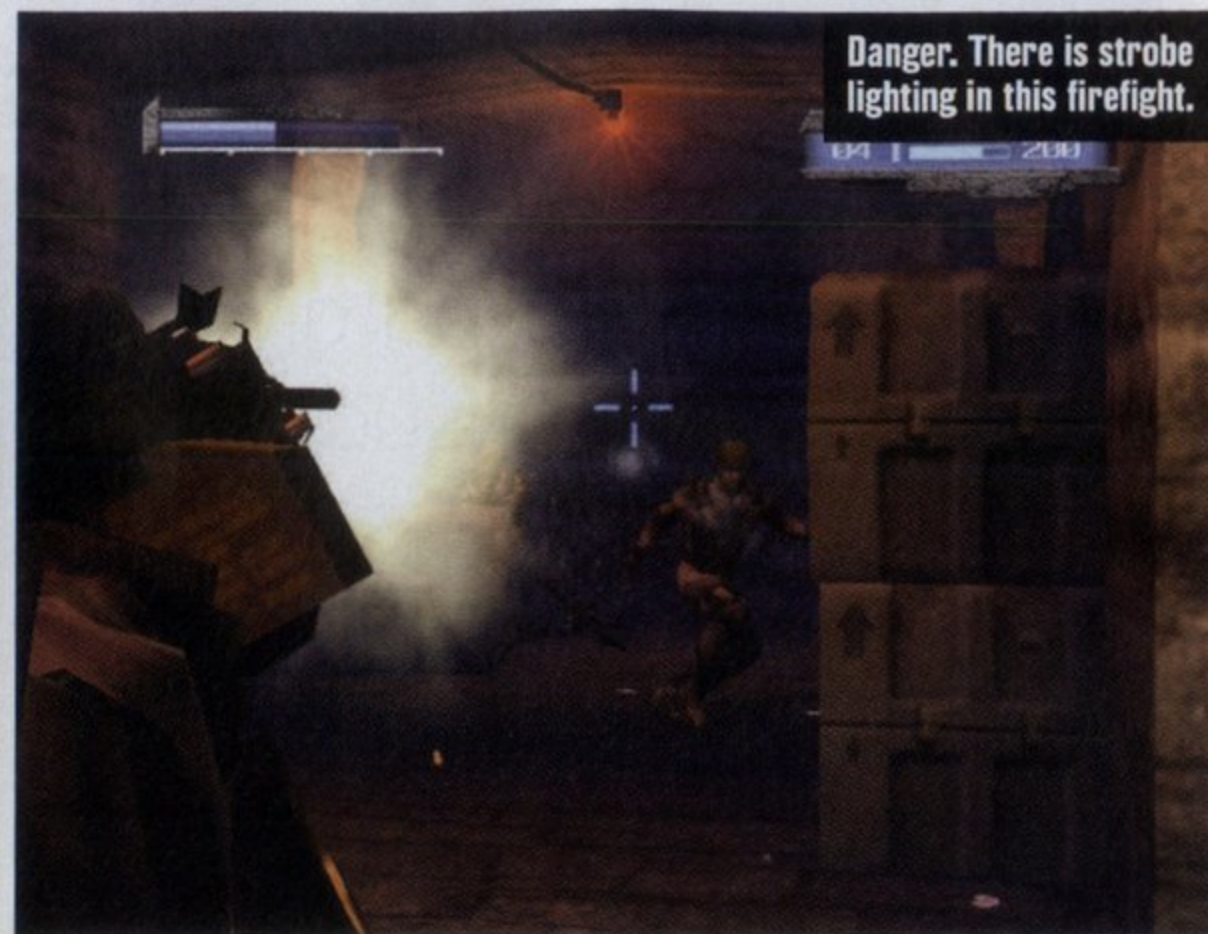
GENRE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION

# KILL SWITCH

When Light Switches Go Bad.

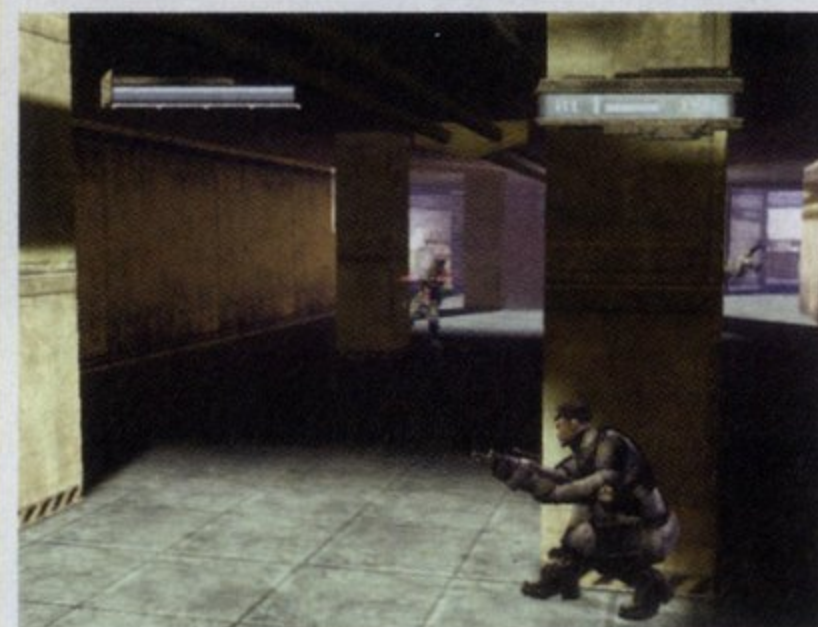


Obstacles like this can confuse the game as to whether you want to peek around, or over the top.



Danger. There is strobe lighting in this firefight.

Hah. He's going to regret leaving the cover of that pillar in precisely... half a second from now.



## DIVE! DIVE!

Being behind cover is one thing. Getting there is another. The impressively propulsive dive is your primary tool, sending you flying through the air with the greatest of ease. Leapfrogging from cover to cover is where *Kill Switch* really clicks.

## PCGA PROFILE

*Kill Switch* is:

- Cheap
- Shallow
- A PS2 game

*Kill Switch* is not:

- Enhanced
- Very long
- Combat Mission II

**BIT** of a dilemma this (*Great cars those dilemmas* – Old Amiga Power In-gag Ed). After examining *Kill Switch* I'm left with a nagging insecurity about how to rate it. It shouldn't really be that difficult: it's a third-person action adventure, with you as a one man army whose only aim is to go from checkpoint A to checkpoint B and put bullets C, D and E in the heads of dastardly terrorists (probably) F, G and H. The trouble is, while *Kill Switch* is as simple as a game can be, it embodies qualities, both negative and positive, that could make or break a far greater game. It's like matter and anti-matter colliding. What will remain when the dust has cleared?

NEGATIVE! It's a direct console port. While not *quite* as direct as some we've seen, its mediocre-PS2 game visuals could only be justified by those claiming that violence is ugly so the game has to be as well. It doesn't even have the advantage some of the better PS2 games have, of having beautifully designed, if polygon-poor, characters. This ain't got no alibi – it's ugly.

POSITIVE! It's got a good idea. By pressing the crouch button while near a

# Binary

wall, you can press your body against it, taking cover and peeking out. So far, so *Metal Gear Solid*. However, you're also able to lean out and shoot, which while common in first-person games has less precedent in third. In fact you can just stick

**"A fun – if as shallow as cellophane – experience."**

your arms out and fire blind, spraying rounds inaccurately at a large incoming force. However...

NEGATIVE! The leaning system can fail on irregular objects or areas where things are at odd angles. You think you can lean against something, and you can't. Grr.

POSITIVE! Where most shooting games are based on your offensive abilities, *Kill Switch* is based on your *defensive* abilities. You'll find yourself darting from cover to cover, dodging in and out of the line of fire with timed leaning actions. With decent AI that shows up some larger budget games like *Max Payne*, you've got a fun – if shallow as cellophane – experience.

NEGATIVE! Any player of moderate ability will get through all six missions in no more than four hours. I got through four of the six in two and a half hours, with breaks.

POSITIVE! It's costs very little.

All things considered, *Kill Switch* merits mild recommendation. Releasing a B-movie game at a sensible price is the sort of intelligent decision that this industry could do with a lot more of, and it deserves to be encouraged.

KIERON GILLEN

■ Publisher **Namco** ■ Developer **Hip Interactive** ■ Minimum System **PIII 500, 64Mb RAM, 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **P4 1GHz, 128Mb, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **None**  
 ■ Web Address **www.killswitch.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Max Payne 2**

Similarly shallow, but prettier. The one good idea: s-l-o-w m-o-t-i-o-n.

**BloodRayne**

Similarly shallow, but longer. Two good ideas: Wade in Gore. Goths in PVC.

**PC GAMES**

A budget game with more innovation – if not quality – than most full-price games.

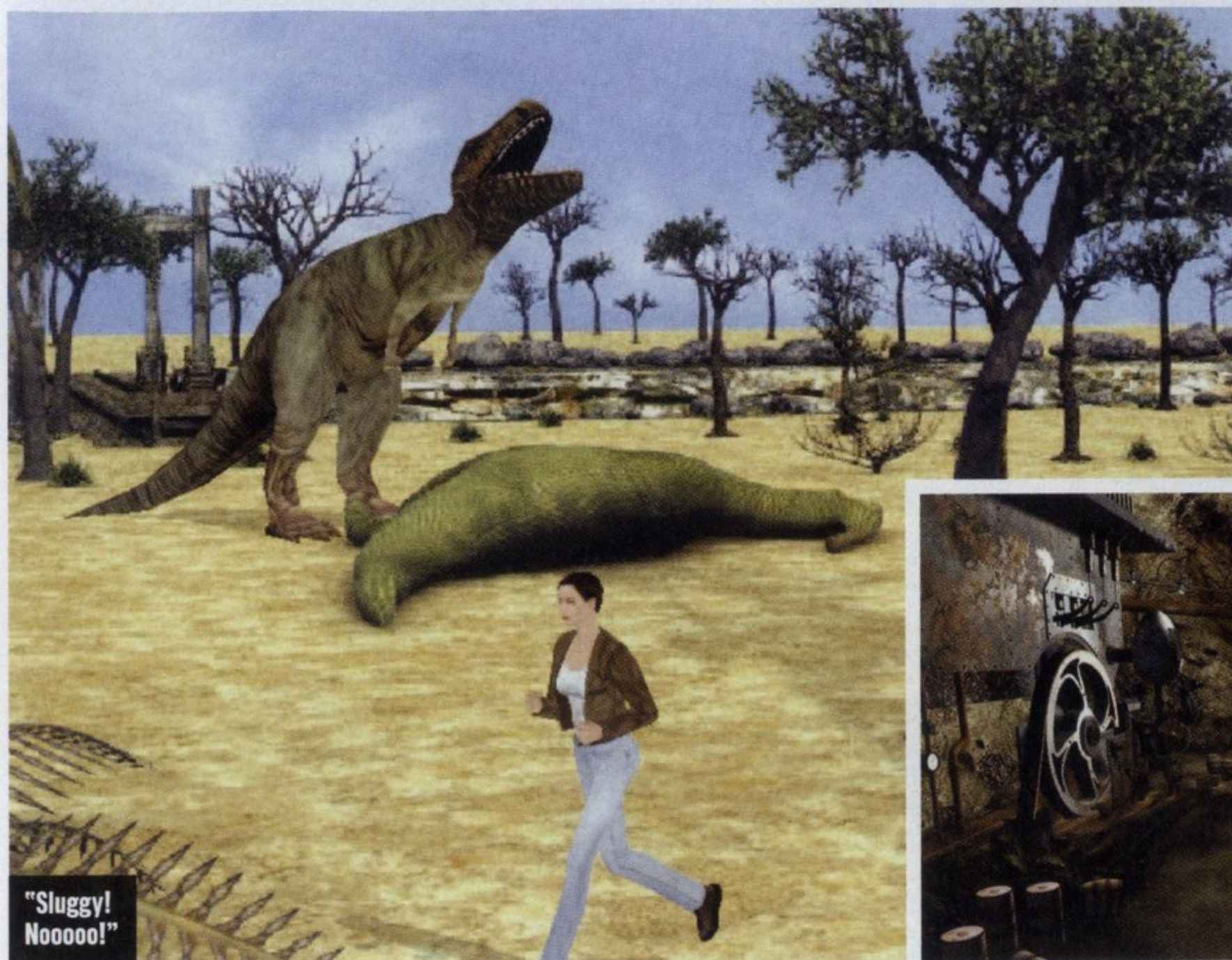
**70%**



GENRE: ADVENTURE

# JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE EARTH

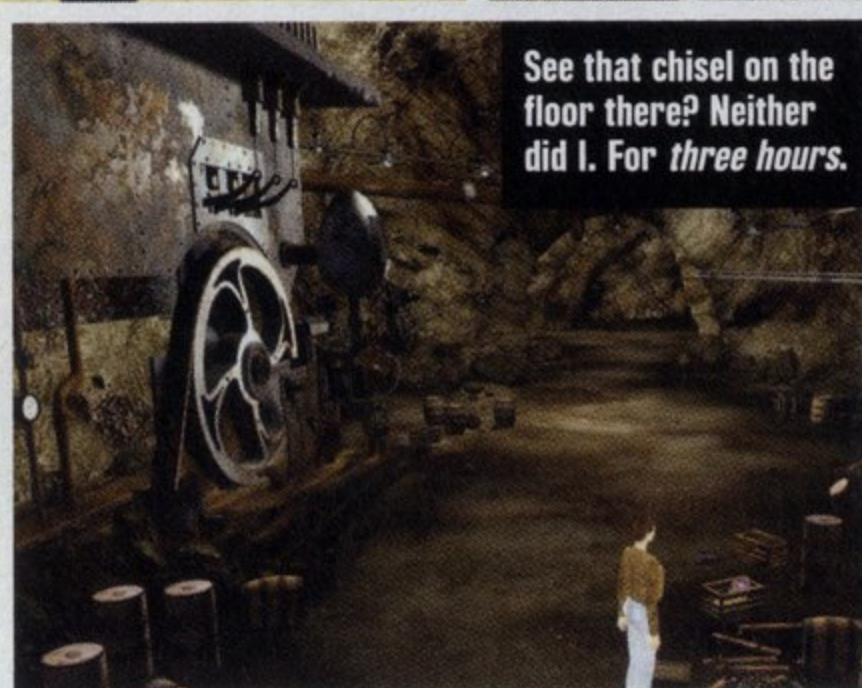
We all like soft centres, but not when getting there is this hard.



"Sluggy! Nooooo!"



In the spirit of avoiding spoilers, that's completely the wrong solution.



See that chisel on the floor there? Neither did I. For three hours.



**IT** might sound like a stupid thing to say, but an adventure game comprises two components: an 'adventure' and a 'game'. The adventure in *Journey* isn't too bad – the rendered backdrops are pretty, the locations exotic, and it has the same fantastical feel as the original novel. But the game – the structure and logic of the puzzles – is too bad.

I meet a man whose friend has been badly injured – he's feverish and needs a splint for his leg. I have a suitable splint, rope, bandages and a bottle of aspirin, but I can't seem to give any of them to him or use them on his friend. If I talk to him, he repeats that his friend needs a splint and something to ease the pain. The actual solution is to run off into a forest, use my knife on a giant mushroom and bring back two slivers of its flesh. And I can't give him the aspirin because I missed a tiny unmarked hotspot in one of the first scenes of the game, so I don't have salt water for him to take it with (which would, of course, do much more harm than good). So even if I can psychically deduce that this is what I should have done, I've still got to walk all the way back to the start of the game to do it. I might as well start again.

## Boring

Yes, it's yet another hotspot nightmare. But aggravated by the reticence of the game: it rarely gives you so much as a hint of what it is you need to do. And the solution you've searched so hard for almost never makes sense. The satisfaction in solving a proper puzzle comes from seeing

**"Bypass the puzzles and get to the adventure."**

why the solution is right, and thereby feeling good about having found it. In *Journey*, you'll usually have no idea why you had to do what you just did, even after you've stumbled across the solution, and you'll be just as baffled when you solve a puzzle as when you're stuck on one.

The first section of the game is made quite bearable by a 'first ten minutes' walkthrough in the manual. And this immediately suggests a much better way of playing the whole game: get a full walkthrough, bypass the puzzles and get to the adventure. Playing this way is almost pleasant – the story is straightforward but not entirely uninteresting, and the solid artwork means the game inherits a compelling sense of discovery from the Jules Verne novel. If it wasn't interrupted by so many tedious inventory puzzles, it might actually verge on the enjoyable.

If you're willing to play a game with a walkthrough in hand, this might have been worth a look at the US price of \$20. But it's a full-price of \$79.95 to us Aussies (although you may find it cheaper by now), and for something that's so punishing to play unaided is really very hard to condone.

TOM FRANCIS

### ZOMBIE JULIE VERNE

Jules Verne is credited in the manual as being responsible for all the voice acting. He's been dead for over a century, and the hero is a she. Did they hold some sort of gender-crossing séance in the recording studio?

### PGA PROFILE

*Journey to the Centre of the Earth* is:

- A chore
- Bug-ridden, but...
- Well-supported online
- Journey to the Centre of the Earth* is not:
- Player-friendly
- Fair
- Worth it

■ Publisher **GMX Media** ■ Developer **Frogwares** ■ Minimum System **PIII 500, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **None**  
 ■ Web Address **www.journey-earth.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

### ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Mr Driller**  
Puzzler in which you drill ever downwards. You never reach the centre of the earth.

**Grim Fandango**  
I'd say *Broken Sword 3*, but this is king of the weird-and-wonderful, and only £15.

**PC GAMES** addict

If golf is a good walk ruined, this is a passable adventure just about wrecked.

**49%**



GENRE: FLIGHT SIMULATION

# IL-2 FORGOTTEN BATTLES ACE EXPANSION PACK

Any more of these self-assessing titles and we're out of a job.



Komet pilots wore special overalls to protect against corrosive fuel leaks.



Shutdowns and fires plague the early jets.



New naval targets include the mighty Tirpitz.



## DOODLEBUGGER

I really wanted to include a screenshot of a Spitfire in the process of 'flipping' a V1 flying bomb but – frankly – I wasn't up to the task. This real-life technique involved daring fighter pilots using their wingtips to roll doodlebugs before they reached their targets and is every bit as devilishly difficult as it sounds.

**THE** closer the Bolshevik hordes got to German borders in WWII, the more amenable the Luftwaffe became to crackpot aircraft ideas. By January 1945 things had got so desperate you could walk into Goering's office with a design scrawled on the back of a tram ticket, mutter a few words like "lift coefficient", "pigeons" and "glue" and within a couple of days you'd find yourself wandering among the pounding presses and whirling lathes of your very own subterranean warbird workshop in the Harz Mountains.

Many of the most outlandish products of this brief aeronautical Enlightenment are replicated in this unmissable (if slightly unfocused) *Forgotten Battles* booster. Machines like the Mistel: a mad composite of pilotless, explosive-stuffed bomber and piggyback fighter; the Komet: a rocket-powered David designed to bring down the B-17 Goliaths that daily darkened Deutsch skies; and the Ho-229: a radical fuselage-free 'flying wing' that never saw combat.

Blurring what would have been a logical focal point (experimental/late-war lovelies) for the pack are a potpourri of other new flyables, including sim stalwarts such as the Spitfire, Mustang, Lightning, and Zero, the long-awaited Bf-110, and dextrous dinosaurs like the Gladiator and Fiat CR-42. As wonderfully modelled and exhilarating to fly as these are, personally

# Chocka

I'd like to have seen a more coherent selection linked with appropriate offline maps and campaigns.

There are new dynamic campaign possibilities, including welcome chances to fly the truly fabulous 110 on the Ost

**"A welcome chance to fly the fabulous Bf-110..."**

Front, and opportunities to enlist in the airforces of minor powers such as Poland, Slovakia and Romania, but these tours generally make use of old planes and arenas. To fully exploit the fresh fleet and new Normandy, Ardennes and Pacific terrains offline and outside of quick battles

and single missions, you'll need to take advantage of Lowengrin's excellent free campaign creation generator (DCG) or consider reaching to the wallet to shell out for *Battle Over Europe*.

If multi-player *Forgotten Battles* wasn't already tempting enough, the new cooperative campaign mode, which spawns sequential sorties on the hoof and allows individual airmen to influence the course of battles, really should persuade soloists to try flying and fighting with flesh-and-blood wingmen.

However you choose to enjoy the fearsomely good *FB*, this add-on is only going to heighten your pleasure. Buy it for the ragbag of new rides, the extra campaigns, or simply to thank Oleg and associates for years of absolutely free, stupidly high-quality *Sturm* updates.

TIM STONE

## PCGA PROFILE

AEP is:

- A hotchpotch
- A freak show
- Ace

AEP is not:

- The end of free IL-2 updates
- Just planes
- Overstocked with Allied campaigns

■ Publisher **Ubisoft** ■ Developer **1C: Maddox Games** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **P4 1.4, 1Gb RAM, 128Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **Internet, LAN, up to 32 players**  
 ■ Web Address **www.il2sturm.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Battle Over Europe**  
 Western Front campaign pack soon to be patched to incorporate AEP aircraft.

**Microsoft Flight Combat Simulator 3**  
 Uncle Bill's unfriendly skies title was originally buggy, but with patches now runs schmickly.

**PCGAMES**  
 More reasons (not that we needed them) to fawn over *Forgotten Battles*.

**81%**



GENRE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION

# BAD BOYS II

Yeah, baby, bad to the bone...



The baddies don't do much damage, but they keep coming – you want to avoid being caught in the open like this.



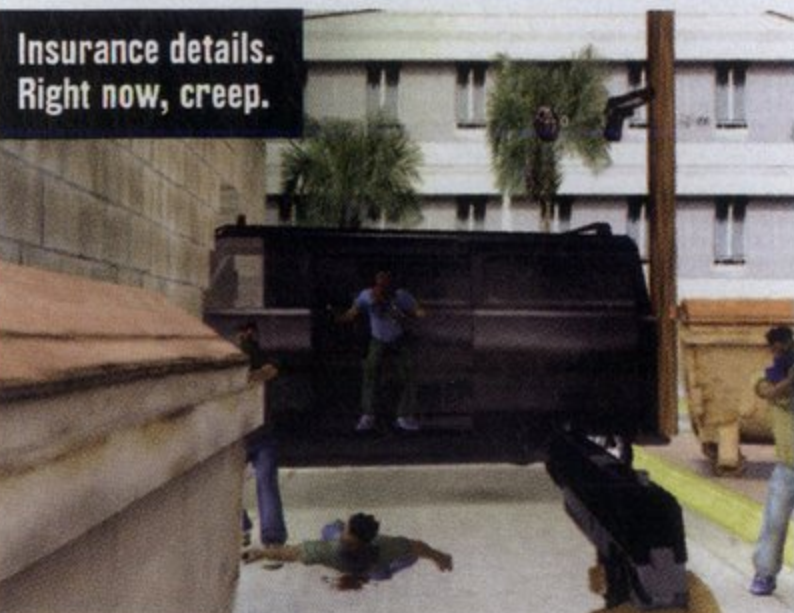
A shot to the face can be... quite sentimental, but a life bar's a boss's best friend.

**WE'D** normally love to tear into a game like this, all guns blazing. Console conversion! Third-person shooting! Bland action movie sequel! Bliss! We'd run through and criticise its many failings, skewering its awful graphics, painful controls and comical attempts at being fresh and funky; perhaps pausing to heap abuse on the rubbish AI or the ghastly level design. But not today! No, today we're only interested in the good stuff – the twists and turns and nips and tucks that transform *Bad Boys II* from a bland generic shooter into a true masterpiece that you'll kill to have on your computer. Like... um...

Give us a moment here...

Wait! Here's one! We see plenty of games that have obviously been designed for a console controller, but *Bad Boys II* is the first that benefits from having claws and talons. Flick the mouse ever so slightly, regardless of sensitivity, and the aiming cursor flicks around like nobody's

Insurance details. Right now, creep.



## Worse

business. Unless you have claws, in which case you can grapple the mouse right towards your target, never mind the need for any cheap 'lock-on' targeting options.

True, it's not quite as satisfying for those of us who aren't mutants or gargoyles, but why pick holes? Most of your enemies are pretty weak anyway, and you can take plenty of hits before hitting the ground (and enjoying the slow, gentle, meditation of the sloth-like

**"A terrible shooter with a camera to die for..."**

loading screen as you wait to restart the whole stage again after screwing up on the boss).

One innovation that we can all enjoy is the 'Cover Points' system. This will be immediately familiar if you've played *Time Crisis*. Each level is dotted with circles, next to desks, against walls, behind staircases and more. Stand on one and you duck out of sight, while retaining a full view of everything that's going on. Press the movement keys and

you pop out, ready to blast some heads, hopefully diving back and out of the way before your enemies can return the favour. It's slightly annoying that the camera shift stops you taking proper aim in this mode, but there are compensations! The baddies just love taking cover themselves too, but almost invariably with their heads popping out for a quick bullet-scalping.

Indeed, such generosity is the absolute hallmark of *Bad Boys II*. It takes with one hand, true, but gives with another. And while you could certainly point out that that first hand is really more of a dump-truck, and the latter primarily providing armpit noises in the shape of the wisecracking script, it would be most churlish to do so. Accurate, yes. But churlish all the same.

Frankly, whether or not you liked the movie, *Bad Boys II* is a terrible shooter, with a camera to die for – over and over and over again – and far too many glitches to make playing it anything other than a chore. Speaking positively though, while it may be a total bomb of a game, it won't actually blow up your monitor and send shards of razor glass through your eyeballs. Good news there, then.

RICHARD COBBETT

### NARCED OFF

Unsurprisingly, *Bad Boys II* doesn't feature the vocal talents of Will Smith and co from the film, although the in-game models do break with licensed game tradition in looking something like them. Action is also punctuated with much the same wisecracking banter, not always successfully (going into an arcade and shouting "Try invading this space, assholes!" should be a hanging offence...) with reasonable enough sound-alikes for lead characters Mike and Marcus, if not Joe Pantoliano's cranky captain.

### PCGA PROFILE

*Bad Boys II* is:  
 ■ Bad  
 ■ Bad  
 ■ You know it. Bad  
*Bad Boys II* is not:  
 ■ Wickie  
 ■ Wickie  
 ■ Wild, Wild West

■ Publisher **Red Ant** ■ Developer **Blitz Games** ■ Minimum System **PIII 600Mhz, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card,**  
 ■ Recommended **PIII 1Ghz, 256Mb RAM** ■ Multi-Player **None**  
 ■ Web Address **www.empireinteractive.co.uk** ■ Release Date **Out now**

### ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Max Payne 2**  
 High action bullet-time blasting with the world's worst policeman.

**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**  
 If you need to ask, you'll never know. Badder than *Bad Boys* will ever be.

**PCGAMES**  
 Who are we kidding?  
 It's terrible. Avoid like  
 a bubonic plague  
 milkshake.

**32%**



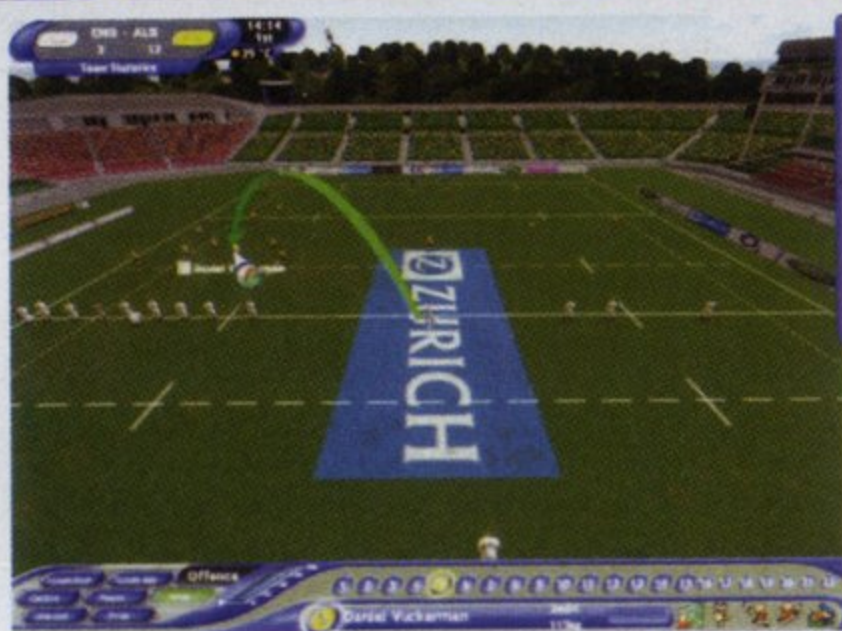
# PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2004

Playing with oddly shaped balls has never been more enjoyable.



## DEVILISH DETAILS

As befits a modern management sim, there is a host of little things to busy yourself with around the club, from setting training regimes and searching for new players to improving the facilities and negotiating contracts. Never as involved as the *CM* model, it nonetheless gives tinkering types a fix of fiddling.



## Scrummy

**AH,** les Bleus. You've got to love the French rugby team. Our beret-wearing European friends bristle with invention and typically offer stiff competition. However, they didn't progress to the final of the last World Cup, and could in a way be accused of never quite fulfilling their potential. Is it too predictable to suggest that Parisian developers Cyanide have done the same with *Pro Rugby Manager 2004*?

Now, it's hard not to reference the phenomenon that is the *Championship Manager* series when reviewing a sports management sim. It's been an inspiration for rivals across many a sport and, at first, *PRM 2004* seems no exception. Take the maze of menus and screens with which you interact with your squad, your club and the wider rugby world. As in *CM*, some are straightforward, others infuriatingly illogical.

Then there's the daily news burst structure. *PRM 2004* relentlessly bombards you with stories, too many in fact, as –

unlike *CM* – it doesn't seem to filter out anything, no matter how irrelevant. However, these flaws aside, it does do the more important things well, namely simulating a rugby season with a fair degree of accuracy and, commendably, making it quite fun too. Fun? Management? Yes, you

## "Less of a life-consuming slog than similar titles"

are reading this correctly. And it's all down to Cyanide breaking away from the *CM* template – in the match engine.

The 3D presentation is certainly better than *CM*'s 2D matches, and the animation and player models embarrass EA's arcade rugby title. The engine really scores in the limited control it gives you over the action, switching defensive and offensive options in

real time using the numpad keys. Control is well pitched although players sometimes do odd things, most notably breaking through a gap then passing back to a team-mate instead of racing ahead. Also, a system of giving commands to an individual is tricky and ineffective, taking certain tactical options away from you. Lastly, there's a sneaky suspicion that, as your mastery of the in-game tactics improves, so the difficulty drops off, making a season with a quality team something of a procession.

Innovation and irritation, then, but not in equal measure. Scores are for the most part realistic and the relatively short length of a rugby season makes it less of a life-consuming slog than soccer management titles such as the *CM* series, which has been cited as being directly responsible for divorces! Management purists may abhor its more hands-on matchplay, but whilst it's not perfect, rugby fans should salute Cyanide for, ahem, trying. Oh dear, I'll get my manteau.

CHRIS BUXTON

## PCGA PROFILE

*PRM 2004* is:

■ The best PC rugby sim

■ A step forward for management

■ Surprisingly good fun

*PRM 2004* is not:

■ Wall to wall stats

■ *CM: Rugby Edition*

■ Without faults

■ Publisher **QV Software** ■ Developer **Cyanide** ■ Minimum System **PIII 500, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **PIII 1GHz, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, 2 players**  
 ■ Web Address **www.prorugbymanager.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

### Rugby 2004

How not to do a rugby game. EA's World Cup tie-in won't make any conversions.

### Champ Man 03/04

Time-devouring titan of sports management in its latest, greatest guise.

**PCGAMES**

Decent rugby title that mixes an involving match engine with management detail.

**78%**



GENRE: ROLE-PLAYING

# SACRED

Is nothing *Sacred*? Apart from this, obviously.



**WHAT** a world of difference there is between the words 'depth' and 'detail'. The world of Ancaria, in this case. Ancaria has detail in spades. Sumptuously rich scenery, a truly vast and varied fantasy realm to play in, and hundreds and hundreds of unique quests and items.

Shame about the depth, though.

Of the six pre-created player characters you can choose from, the Vampiress and Seraphim (a kind of angelic anti-vampire) are at least something a little different. But chiefly what *Sacred* offers is a huge seamless world to explore. Deserts, towns, forests and dungeons, and everywhere you go, folk offering you optional side-quests. Some of these are clearly randomly generated and can feel a little samey after a while, but hey, they are optional. In terms of content, there are weeks and weeks of adventuring here, and given the randomness of the side-quests, a fair bit of replay value too.

What's the story? Oh, evil stirring in the land, worsening orc incursions, betrayal in high places. Yadda yadda yadda. At least it keeps things moving.

Which is very much the idea. While there's nothing original about *Sacred*, the familiar fantasy mechanics have been expertly streamlined, with all the clutter and fiddly stuff stripped away. There are dozens of spells and special moves, for example, and you can even chain them together to form combos, but combat remains as simple as mouse-clicking your opponent until your finger aches.

## Holey

Party management is even simpler. You don't have a party. There's just you, and occasional companions who require no micro-management whatsoever. Even if Wilbur gets killed, he's just knocked unconscious and springs back to his feet a minute later. Unrealistic? No more so than

**"Sacred offers a huge seamless world."**

carrying his body to the local Temple of Resurrection or whatever, and a damn sight less tedious. Similarly, you can always summon your horse *instantly*, even if you last abandoned it in a monster-filled wilderness 300 screens back. Again, it's simply game convenience over realism. The game map even shows you where to

find the NPC who sent you on a quest when you've completed it, so you know where to go to collect your reward.

The result is pain-free, fast-paced RPG action, and it's maddeningly addictive. It's also remorselessly shallow. You can't chat to people, you can only click on them to get a quest or a random piece of news. You do nothing but fight your way from one end of the country to the other. You will never, ever, be asked to make a difficult moral decision.

Special mention must be made of *Sacred*'s graphics. Play this isometric RPG for five minutes and the 3D approach of *Dungeon Siege* and others begins to look decidedly gimmicky. The advantage really shows when you zoom right in – and you can – and the view doesn't turn into a collection of unconvincing polygons. It just carries on looking beautiful. Detail, you see. It's not everything, but it helps.

TONY ELLIS

### GET STUFFED

Whoever called *The Sims* a symbol of our consumerist society clearly hasn't played enough fantasy RPGs. They're all about getting stuff, and *Sacred* takes this to a ridiculous level. Potions, fancy weapons, armour and gold. Open a cupboard in a peasant's hovel and the stuff falls out of it, not to mention what you get for killing monsters or simply find, lying around. My huge inventory is currently bursting with expensive junk I don't really need. If there's such a thing as an iPod +3, I have three of them.

### PCGA PROFILE

*Sacred* is:

- Big
  - Streamlined
  - Action-filled
- Sacred* is not:
- Chatty
  - Remotely original
  - A cow

■ Publisher **Red Ant** ■ Developer **Ascaron** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card**  
 ■ Recommended **P4 1.1GHz, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card** ■ Multi-Player **LAN, internet, up to 16**  
 ■ Web Address **www.sacred-game.com** ■ Release Date **Out now**

### ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Star Wars: KotOR**  
 Recommended if your idea of RPG involves more than just hitting stuff.

**Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark**  
 Dungeon-bashing, but in 3D this time.

**PC GAMES**  
 Fast-paced, addictive  
 orc-bashing on a  
 massive scale. Not  
 original, but addictive.

**81%**



GENRE: THIRD-PERSON ACTION

# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

You have the duvet cover, the toys and the DVDs, now buy the videogame. Ten years after it stopped being fashionable.



You'll find all kinds of snacks in the crates. Including, yes, pizza.

## HIGH SCORE DUDE

Thanks to its console heritage, *TMNT* is blessed with good bonus material. You can unlock the option to play as the Zen rat-master Splinter, or view art galleries featuring concept drawings from the game. Thankfully, you can grab a friend and loved one to work through the game as a team, or simply hit each other with sticks.

## PCGA PROFILE

**TMNT is:**  
 ■ Occasionally imaginative  
 ■ Repetitive  
 ■ A button shredder  
**TMNT is not:**  
 ■ Radical  
 ■ Four player  
 ■ Bad

**THE** questions you ask as an adult are irrelevant when you're but a slip of a child. The Turtles lived in a sewer. They had three fingers, no thumbs. And yet, in between bashing men in the face, they found time to customise a van, and build, from scratch, a blimp. This is colloidal fiction: a suspension of disbelief. Squint a bit and hope it all makes sense.

That attitude applies to the licensed game. It's a button basher, ported from the consoles without a thought for the whims of PC gamers. That alone should be enough to set your teeth on edge. Don't let it. *TMNT* is fine, as long as you don't stare too hard.

You control one of the turtles (bizarrely, never as a team of four, be it AI turtles or your chums – this is odd and wrong) through the faceless urban scenery of New York, hitting teenagers with your curiously blunt weaponry until they fall down and evaporate. Combo attacks are key, chaining up to 30 thrusts and slices at once, scything through crowds of foes, finishing with a flourish. Each blow is accompanied by a shout or exclamation from your chosen amphibian and an onomatopoeic effect: a 'THWOCK!' or 'BASH!'

The whole game is couched in repetition. There's little variety in the types of



Fear his enormous mouth of metal.



You could almost call them cute.

# Spotty

enemies, or types of situations. The armies of teenage thugs appear to have constructed a secret cloning facility within the Tri-State area. Worse, because of the lack of in-game save, you'll frequently be sent back to square one, forced to wander through the same streets and alleys, murdering the same men and robots.

Which makes the game sound far worse than it is. The combat is tidily done. You can juggle your opponents in the air, or knock them back onto their gang, scattering them like skittles. When you defeat a robot it explodes, so you learn to save your blows for the bigger robots, and then skip away, allowing the explosion to knock

down anyone around. Follow it up with shuriken and high kicks. Move on. Repeat.

*TMNT* doesn't do anything new, or anything vaguely interesting. But, as you play, you drift into the world. Bash. Bash, bash, swipe, turn and bash. It's beautifully presented, and faithful to the cartoon series. There's a ballet going on, driving you ever onward, always progressing. Konami could do this in their sleep. Here, they're not even trying. And it still works.

There are cracks in the shell, but the comic book enthusiasm, low price, bombastic noise and sheer exuberance papers over them. Squint, and you'll enjoy it.

TIM EDWARDS

■ Publisher **Atari** ■ Developer **Konami** ■ Minimum System **PIII 800, 128Mb RAM, GeForce 3, 2.5Gb HD space**  
 ■ Recommended **PIII 1GHz, 256Mb RAM, GeForce 4 Ti, gamepad** ■ Multi-Player **Single PC, two players.**  
 ■ Web Address **www.konami.com/tmnt** ■ Release Date **16th April**

## ALSO WORTH A LOOK...

**Armed and Dangerous**  
 Lunatic comedy blasting that's sadly not as clever as it thinks it is.

**Prince of Persia**  
 Astonishing time-twisting platformer. An inspiring celebration of movement.

**PC GAMES ADDICT**  
 Heroes in a half-baked hack-and-slash adventure. Repetitive, mindless escapism.

**61%**



# THE ENTENTE BATTLEFIELDS WWI

Nothing *cordiale* about this *Entente*. Something *diabolique*, more like.

■ Publisher **Red Ant** ■ Developer **Buka** ■ Price **\$49.95**



**ONE** of the chief characteristics of the First World War: mud. And curiously enough, this game will make you feel as if you've been rolling in the stuff – or something even niffier – as it drags you down with its clumsy interface, lumpy visuals and the crushingly tedious micro-management of literally hundreds of jiggling pixels. Sorry, troops.

Born out of time, this game features all the failings of early real-time strategy, and none of the genre's later refinements. Troops stand still and do nothing under fire – unless you tell them to react. That shouldn't be *my* job. I'm the bloody *General*. If you need your hand held, soldier, go and talk to your sergeant – he'll smack it for you and order you to think for yourself. Aah, God, if only he would.

Nevertheless, it's war on a grand scale, and that's the raggedy feather in *Entente's* soiled cap. Indeed, the game claims to support up to 80,000 units on a single map. These huge battles involve a broad variation of unit types, including artillery, early mortars, mixed infantry and cavalry types, tanks, trucks and glue-and-canvas aircraft. The tech tree is relatively simple to get your head around, although getting an army up and running (in the missions where you're



tasked to do so) is a long, drawn-out process. There are five resources to feed the war machine with, and even mildly advanced technologies take a shocking amount of time to build. Take it from me, when your base is under constant attack, those minutes stretch into subjective hours.

In battle, however, your options are surprisingly comprehensive. Troops can be banded together to form cohesive units, then arranged into formations. In addition, there's a distinction between ranged combat and melee. In the first mode, your troops can be told to stand and fire their rifles – which is all well and good when you're facing other infantry, but when the artillery starts raining down your forces need to keep on the move. Which is where melee comes in, as you order groups to stow rifles, whip out the grenades and perform bayonet charges.

A few nice options don't excuse the jerky scrolling, lack of zoom, the crumbly graphics, the shoddy pathfinding, and all the other elements which conspire to carbon-date this game squarely back to the last decade. Fans of militaria may enjoy its observed use of regional cavalry and early weapons of 20th Century war, but we can't see anyone really jumping for joy when they play *Entente*.

AL BICKHAM

**PC GAMES**  
addict  
Like Kaiser Wilhelm after a bad night's sleep: crumbly and jaded. But nicely priced.

**61%**

# YU-GI-OH! KAIBA THE REVENGE

■ Publisher **Atari**  
■ Developer **Konami**  
■ Price **\$49.95**



*Yu-Gi-Oh! Power of Chaos: Kaiba The Revenge* (snappy, huh?) makes no concessions to *Yu-Gi-Oh!* virgins. If you've ever been puzzled as to why the doe-eyed anime boy with the spiky hair enjoys flinging cards around, only hard, painful graft will lead to illumination. *Kaiba* is brutal in its disregard for newcomers. But then, it's already got an immense captive audience, for whom the impenetrable is just another wrinkle in the lives of the Saturday-morning cartoon characters.

However, while it may take a brave soul to see past the arcane mythology of the TV show, put simply, beneath the crudely-drawn characters and alien names and references beats the heart of a sturdily-designed card game. One that's easy to learn but – yes – hard to master.

A direct sequel to last year's *Power of Chaos*, *Kaiba the Revenge* is both a continuation of that game and a stand-alone entry into the series, although it really does nothing to improve on an admittedly already-solid template. For the serious fan, there is a host of new cards to bring the total from both games to 450, allowing for deeper deck designs. But despite the unforgivable omission of a tutorial, this is easy to learn and doesn't require knowledge of *Power of Chaos*.

As before, the aim is to knock points off your opponent. Monsters are played to the board, and form lines of attack and defence – you need to kill the monsters before you can harm the player. These lines are backed up with spells that enhance their abilities, traps to hornswaggle enemy beasts, and so on. Winning games earns you cards that you can use in your own deck designs, and the playground-swap mentality of the 'real' card game is reproduced intact.

The alien context might put you off, but if you're after a pleasingly deep, easy-to-learn PC card game, this fits the bill.

JES BICKHAM

**72%**



# TAKE SPIDEY HEAD-ON

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LOOK AT SPIDER-MAN 2 - THE GAME  
AND THE MOVIE!

ON SALE NOW!



PlayStation®2  
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Australia's ONLY magazine  
with playable demos.





# Hardware

**Gear/Gadgets/Apps/Utilities** **Definitive reviews**

▼ **JERE LAWRENCE**  
**HARDWARE ED.**



## CAN WE SAY WE LIVE IN A WI-FI WORLD?

**I**n the mid nineties there was often talk of the "connected household". One where the computer was the "brain" or central hub of a house and it would control everything from the environment to automation of appliances and lights. LG took noble steps to realising this and a range of their air conditioners allowed for settings to be changed with a phone call but "connected households" were nowhere near realisation.

Until now. Enter Wi-Fi, the barebones / Media PC and a healthy dose of innovative technology and we're well on the way to another digital explosion. For example, our review of the squeezebox wireless MP3 player shows that Wi-Fi's horizons are much broader than simple PC networking.

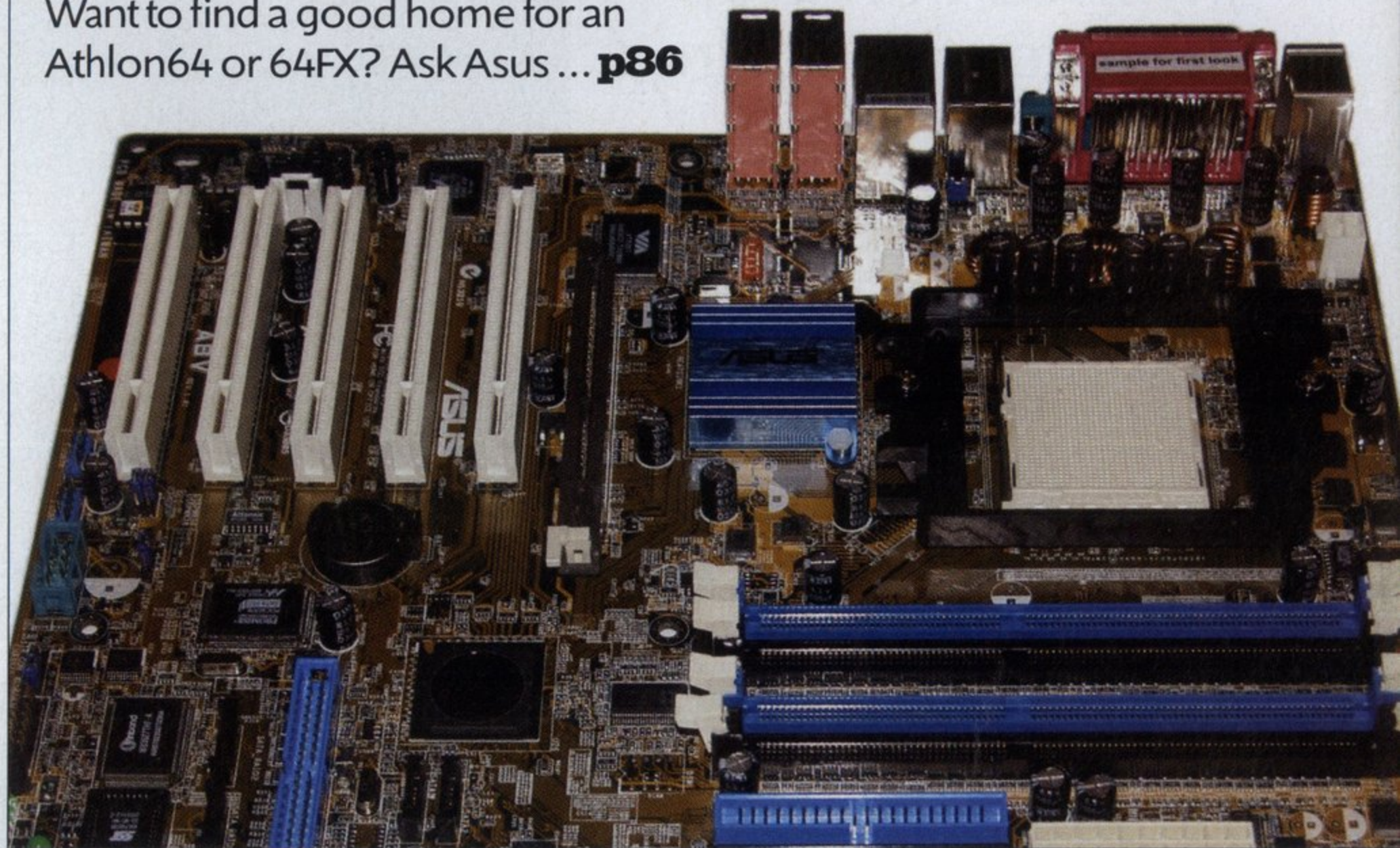
Taking it one step further is the emerging trend of barebones / Mini PCs. Designed aesthetically to blend in with a home theatre setup the integration of Wi-Fi into these systems allows you to stream video from your PC directly to your home theatre setup, wirelessly. Of course the latter PC setup could also stream MP3s and internet radio but that's pretty small given the potential of consumer Wi-Fi.

Imagine Wi-Fi enabled DVD-Recorders that broadcast a digital AV stream so that multiple TFT LCD TV/receivers could connect to it and watch. From small-fry abilities such as allowing a PC to control household appliances to your very safety. The Wi-Fi "Volvo" of smoke alarms could not only make a loud beep but also use your PC to email you at work, SMS your mobile and email the local fire department. It's going to be interesting indeed to see just how far it will go.

**Jere Lawrence**  
**Hardware Editor**

## ASUS A8V DELUXE

Want to find a good home for an Athlon64 or 64FX? Ask Asus ... **p86**



**87**



**MV350E DVD Camcorder**  
Recording video to DVD-RAM? Yes, and it rocks!

**88**



**Western Digital Media Centre**  
A massive media storage device in more ways than one...

**93**

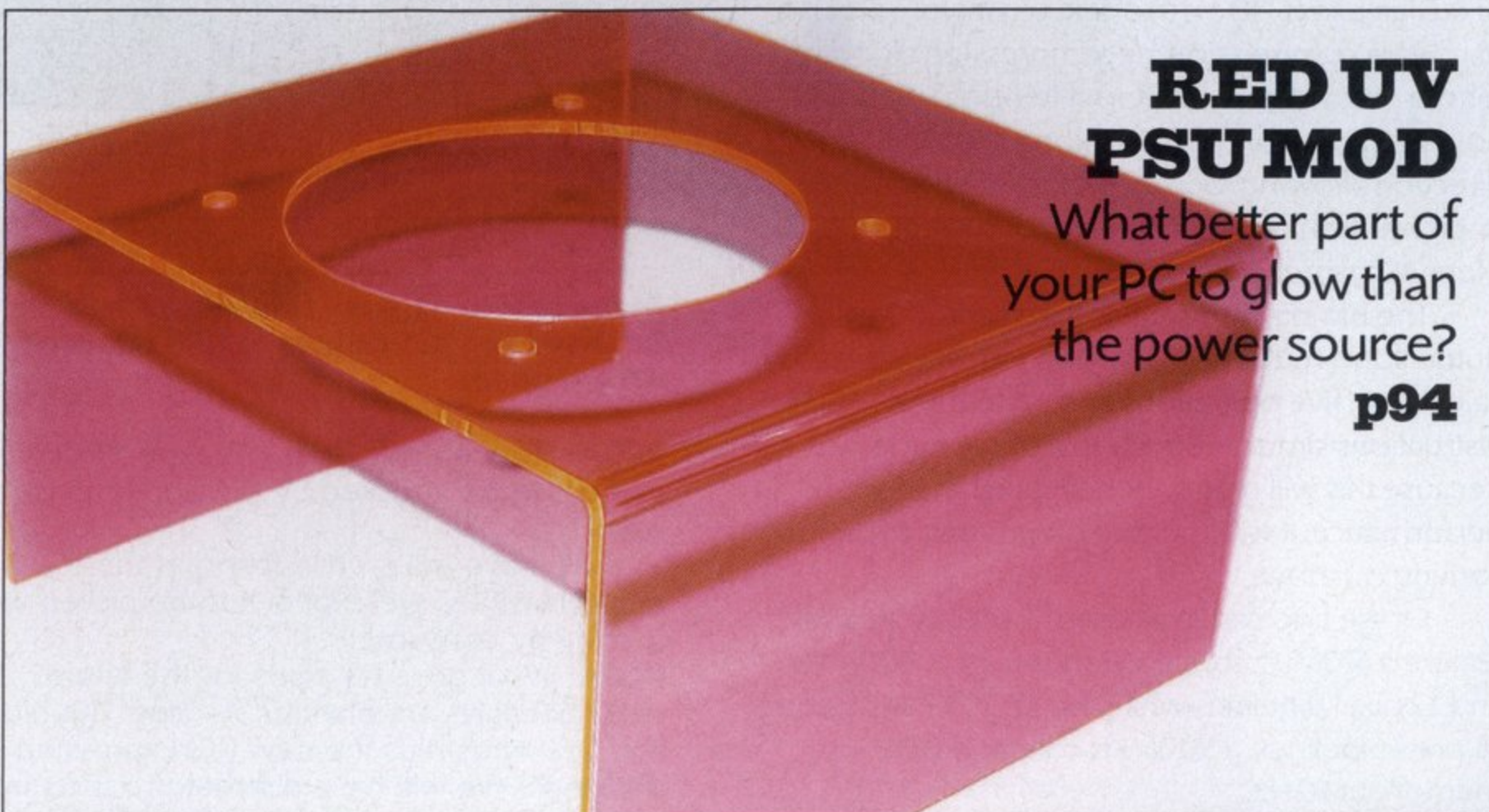


**Zippy Metal Keyboard WK-720**  
It's cold steel the best deal, or just a scnick looking gimmick?

## RED UV PSU MOD

What better part of your PC to glow than the power source?

**p94**





# ATi announces the X800 range

There's no poker face involved, but ATi up the ante once again.

**T**he release of ATi's high end, flagship card, is imminent and utilising the new R420 chipset, benchmarks will once again soar. Officially named the RADEON X800 two versions will be available by the middle of the year, the X800 Pro and the X800 XT which is suspiciously similar to NVIDIA's newly named 6800 NV40 based card.

Another technology that is nearing completion and is bound for motherboards soon is PCI Express (PCIE) which ATi has plans to support upon release. PCIE performance increases will only be apparent when the system bus is being heavily utilised though and although games like FarCry will be accelerated it will be a good 12 months before developers can really take advantage of it. On the other hand video editing is going to be twice as fast on a PCIE bus which will be handy given that the X800 cards will support HDTV. A significant upgrade in video processing, current cards process video at 720 x 480, HDTV is 1920 x 1080.

According to ATi, the X800 is going to feature the world's fastest VPU, twice the number of pixel pipelines, geometry processors and will be twice the performance of the 9800XT. Aiding in this increase will be a new manufacturing process cramming more into the same space by moving from a .15 to .13 micron process giving room to 160 million transistors. Furthermore higher clock speeds at lower power will allow for 80 concurrent pixel shader operations per clock cycle, 200 billion floating point operations per second and a fill rate of 8 Giga pixels. 3Dc is the next big feature and is a hardware compression/decompression algorithm for normal mapping. Different to bump mapping, a normal map conveys pixel information with a direction allowing for much sharper effects and improves graphics quality, even of current and older 3D games.

The big claim though is that the X800 will outperform NVIDIA's 220 million transistor beast by calculating five operations and up to three instructions simultaneously in a single cycle. Because this will greatly benefit pixel shader performance, it will improve games that are coming out now.

Of the two cards released, the X800 Pro will feature a 475MHz core, DDR memory at 900MHz and 12 pixel pipelines while the X800XT will feature 16 pixel pipelines, a 500MHz core and DDR memory at 1GHz.



## ATi speaks out

**At the launch we took time out with Daniel Taranov from ATi Canada to find out what else ATi are up to.**

**PCGA:** How quickly does ATi expect PCI express to be adopted by the public consumer base?

**ATi:** We have mass production of these cards due this winter, we expect it to be picked up quickly by consumers.

**PCGA:** What are ATi's plans for the future?

**ATi:** AGP parts are planned for both the high and low ends plus the new PCI Express on desktops. We will have discrete products from

the top to bottom.

**PCGA:** Given that there was talk it was an ATi employee who leaked the Doom 3 alpha, is ATi's relationship with gaming companies as strong as ever?

**ATi:** Absolutely. We have a large and growing vendor support team and it has not tarnished our relationships at a company level with them. I can't see that happening. We work closely on a number of marketing levels, with developers, including id software. We have people who work with them on a daily basis who are dedicated to working with them, on those titles they are coming out with. How did we repair the damage? It was minimal and more on the marketing side then on the hardware or engineering side.





# Asus and nVIDIA unveils the NV40

## Redesigned pixel shaders - So *this* is the way it's meant to be played?

**T**hanks to our friends at Asus we were given a sneak peek of their new FX6800 offering featuring the new NV40 chipset and an overview of what this card can do.

The first improvement is in the area of die size and thanks to IBM manufacturing the chip is made at the .13 micron process. Even more impressive though is that 222 million transistors make up the chip, 44 million transistors more than a Pentium 4.

Available in either AGP or PCI Express form the same principles will apply and it won't be necessary to upgrade to PCIE immediately at launch because current software doesn't move enough geometry to fully utilise PCIE. This of course will change as software companies develop with newer platforms in mind. Current software is of course going to perform incredibly as the 6800 runs at a clock speed of 400MHz and its DDR memory at an effective 1.1GHz. That's 35.2GB/s of memory bandwidth which allows the 6800 to move textures really fast.

As can be seen from the image one of the potential drawbacks to the 6800 is that it requires power to two 5.25" Molex connectors and draws a whopping 110w of power. How this will affect the consumer base is yet to be seen but this could end up being a helpdesk nightmare as people with inadequate power supplies cause their system to "brown out". nVIDIA junkies may also want to invest in a power splitter cable before release.

The rapid support, popularity and acceptance of pixel shaders by developers has seen the nVIDIA team completely

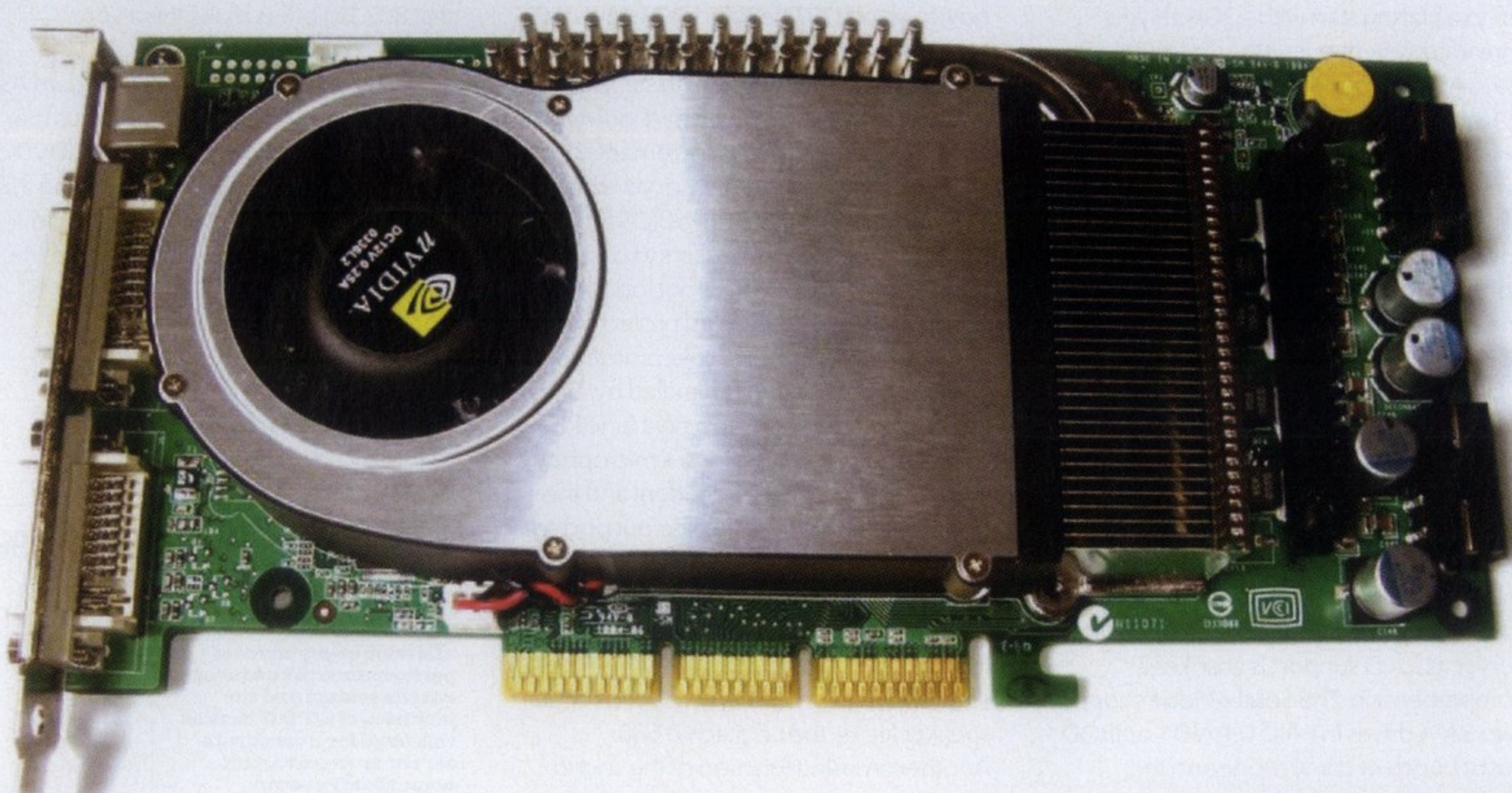
redesign their pixel shader engine for the NV40. Able to process 16 pixels per clock cycle with full 32-bit floating point (fractional numbers) precision, the NV40 has double the computing power of its forerunner and is 25% more accurate than a Radeon 9800XT.

The NV40 is also fully ready for the release of Direct X 9.0c with hardware support for pixel shaders 3.0. This will allow for considerably more interesting special effects because pixel shader 2.0 programs are limited in length to 96 instructions where pixel shader 3.0 supports an instruction length of 65,536. The same increase has been made in the Vertex Shader 3.0 specification allowing for more complex geometric animations. The much touted Ultra Shadow functionality used in *Doom III* has been upgraded to Ultra Shadows II and it's rather amusing that the hardware is upgraded before the heavily hyped and marketed software that uses it is released.

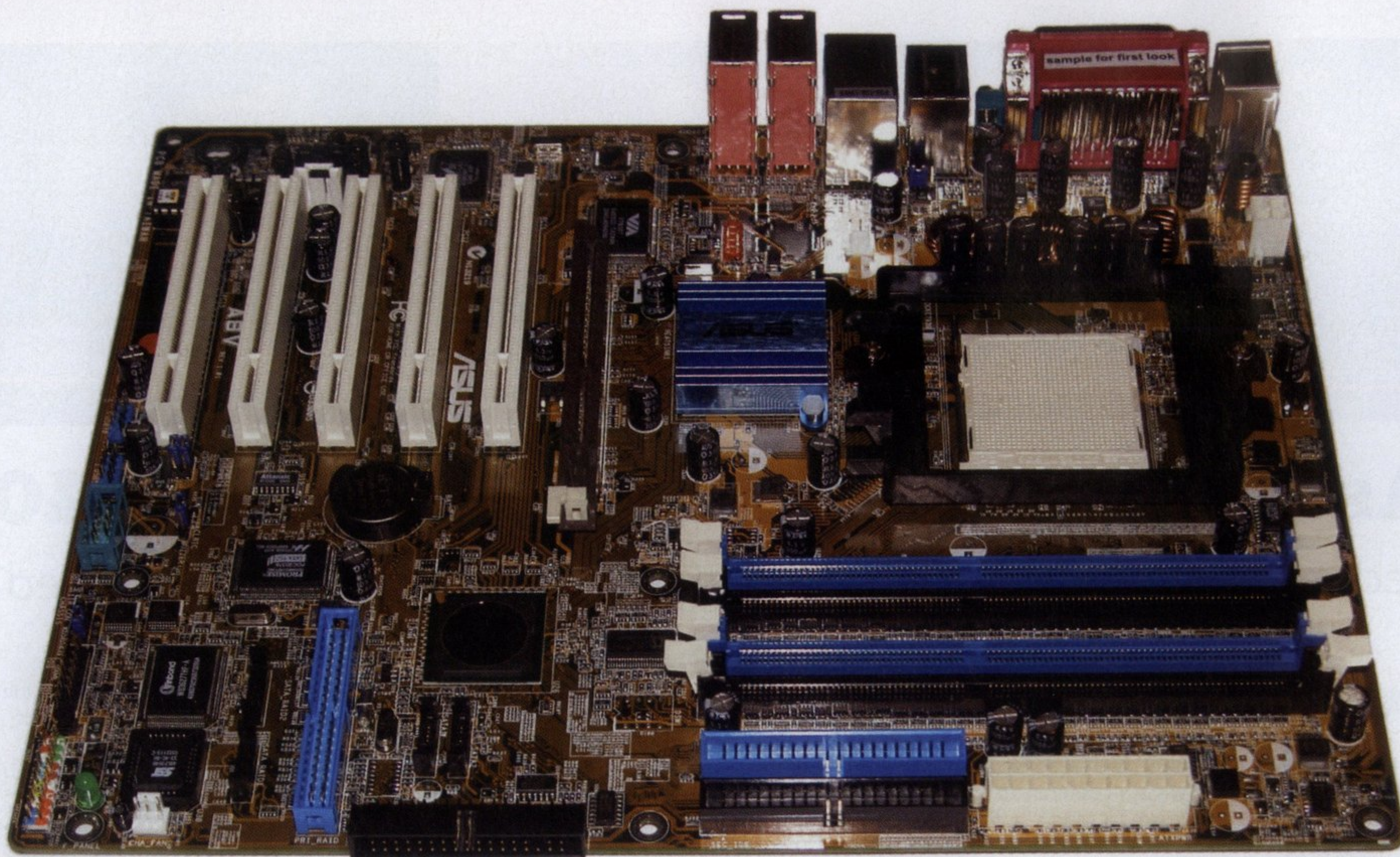
Not to be outdone by ATI and because the chipset is so powerful the NV40 fully supports HDTV processing and playback. Currently hardware accelerates video up to 720 x 480, HDTV support will increase that to 1920 x 1080 – that's 2 megapixels worth of data every 24th of a second.

Full Screen Anti Aliasing is an area where nVIDIA haven't fared the best but a change to how the processing is done might change this. The new edge is achieved by increasing the number of pixels used in sampling analysis and the ability to use offsets for diagonal or curved lines. More so by using a "rotated grid" methodology the NV40 can mix supersampling with multisampling to offer a wider range of full screen anti aliasing methods.

As can be seen from the screenshots of Nula, nVIDIA's new female mascot is rendered incredibly, particularly the vertex shaded hair which moves realistically under water. A mermaid though – I guess they didn't want any more of their booth babes escaping.







## ASUS A8V DELUXE

First look at Asus 64-bit solution

**A**sus who have been renowned for high quality Intel solutions are moving out into the world of 64-bit operations with support for the Socket 939 AMD Athlon64 processor. Using the K8T8000 Pro chipset the board is off to a blazing start with a 2GHz Hyper threaded system bus.

Able to support up to 4GB of DDR400 RAM, dual channel memory addressing is employed so for best results make sure that two identical chips are always used. 1GB of memory is advantageous; using two 512MB modules will boost performance considerably. One stick of DDR400 memory is only 75% the speed of 1066MHz RDRAM but two sticks of DDR400 in a dual channel configuration is 40% faster than 1066MHz RDRAM.

On board there's plenty of scope for expansion with one 8X AGP port and five PCI. PCI Express hasn't been included in this version which might be a problem given the imminent release of this new technology. This is an excellent board for a server as RAID support is absolutely comprehensive. The South Bridge supports two SATA drives in RAID 0, RAID 1 or JBOD (just a bunch of disks) mode and the

inclusion of a Promise 20378 controller adds support for another two SATA devices that can be run in RAID 0, 1, 0+1 and "Multiple RAID" modes.

64-bit overclockers can rejoice because Asus has added numerous overclocking features to the BIOS. For the novice or lazy, AI Overclocking allows you to set a percentile value to automatically overclock the entire system in steps of 1% or control the voltage to each part individually. The CPU can be raised in increments of 0.025V, along with the memory and AGP bus. And on the mod front a BIOS function called "My Logo" allows users to convert images into a 256 colour boot logo. A word of advice though, password protect your BIOS if there are practical jokers around.

On board sound is handled by a Realtek ALC850 chip with a neat function called "Audio Sensing". Plug a microphone into the line out port by accident and the board will reconfigure the line out port as the microphone. A clever function, it's a nice way of making the trip under the desk a lot more bearable. Optical sound output is also included in the form of an S/PDIF connector so you can go straight to an AMP or digital speaker kit, i.e. the Logitech Z-680s. Another amusing function of the sound

card is that when booting your system a voice signals the functional state of your PC.

Besides support for 10/100/1000 Ethernet LAN the A8V also ships with 802.11g (54Mbps) WiFi built in. An "on die" antennae means nothing ugly has to be placed on your desk and the faster speed that 802.11g offers make this a very attractive inclusion.

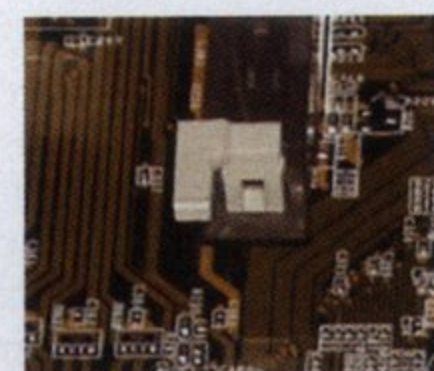
The bundled software is standard Asus fare. There's the usual driver disk plus the ubiquitous copy of Intervideo's WinDVD suite. Though you wouldn't be buying this board for its software but rather for the awesome performance this brings to the 64-bit AMD chips.

### PCGA Verdict

- 2.0GHz hyper threaded system bus and 802.11g WiFi
- No support for PCI Express

**This board will help you bring out the full potential of an AMD 64 bit socket 939 processor. Off to a good start with a 2.0GHz system bus, overclocking options allow for every ounce of performance to be squeezed out the system and the inclusion of S/PDIF makes this ideal for a corporate server or extravagant home theatre setup.**

# 91%



### →Detail

**CPU:** Socket 939 for AMD Athlon64, 64FX  
**FSB:** 2.0/1.6  
**AGP:** 8x (1 slot)  
**RAM:** Support for 4 DIMMs, 266/333/400 Dual Ch DDR DIMM up to 4GB  
**Expansion:** 5 x PCI 32  
**Audio:** Realtek ALC850 8 channel controller with Coaxial/S/PDIF outputs  
**Communication:** 10/100/1000Mbps, 802.11g (54Mbps) WiFi  
**Storage:** 3 x UDMA, 4 x SATA  
**RAID:** 0, 1, 0+1, JBOD, Multiple RAID  
**USB:** 2.0 x 4  
**Firewire:** 1 x IEEE1394  
**Price:** TBA  
**Distributor:** Asus  
**Web:** www.asus.com.au  
**Phone:** (02) 9683 3488





## HITACHI DZ-MV350E DVD CAMCORDER

DVD-R bad, DVD-RAM good!

As the translation of media to the digital format continues we're going to see a lot more "crossover" consumer electronic devices. Such is the case with this DVD Camcorder which due to its digital nature records video in a format that is entirely compatible with video on your PC.

What's changed though is how you get the data there. Previously digital camcorders would write their data onto magnetic tape which required lengthy transfers from camera to PC via Firewire. The DZ-MV350E however writes its data to either DVD-R or DVD-RAM 8cm (1.4GB) disks so that transferring the data is as easy as inserting it into a compatible drive on your PC. But let's get something straight first; DVD-R is not a pleasant format to work with. The reason is that you can only write to DVD-R once which isn't convenient when using this camera in a social capacity. DVD-RAM on the other hand is a far superior recording format which can be erased and re-written to 100,000 times. When you also consider that a DVD-R costs \$21 and is useless once filled and that a DVD-RAM disk costs \$34 and is massively reusable it doesn't make a lot of sense to use DVD-R.

Extremely easy to use the camera isn't riddled with buttons and special effects functions because you can do that on your PC later with the bundled software. Instead it offers clearly labelled functions such as full auto, manual focus, exposure and my favourite, the digital shake eliminator, along with a thumb button for recording and index finder zooming. The quality of the recordings is vibrantly clear and of excellent quality plus a 16:9 mode on the camera allows for perfect widescreen recording and playback.

### PCGA Verdict

- Incredibly light, excellent video capture quality, 10x optical zoom and DVD-RAM support
- DVD-R doesn't work well in camcorders and the maximum resolution of a still is 640x480

A digital video camera that is easy to use, capture quality is good, is light and able to write to DVD-RAM/R optical media.

91%



### →Detail

**Optical Zoom:** 10x  
**Digital Zoom:** 240x  
**Recording Format:** DVD-RAM, DVD-R  
**LCD Display:** 2.5"  
**Total pixels:** 800K  
**Image Stabilizer:** Yes  
**Minimum Lux:** 0.3 lux  
**Still image:** Yes  
**Multi Media Card:** Yes, SD  
**USB:** 2.0 for transfers  
**S-video out:** Yes  
**56mm (W) x 133mm (D) x 89mm (H)**  
**Weight:** 530g with battery  
**Price:** \$1990  
**Distributor:** Hitachi  
**Web:** www.hitachi.com.au  
**Phone:** (02) 9888 4100



## CREATIVE DC-CAM 3200Z

Now anyone can afford to take a decent photo

Although TV is something a gamer rarely has time for every now and then you're forced to endure video blasphemy in its most phosphorescent evil. In this situation it was digital cameras and the sale thereof on a certain "good" morning show. The microscopic toy they were trying to peddle was a 1 megapixel digital camera that was revolutionary because of its tiny size. Even scarier were the supposed consumer endorsements who claim they will forever treasure their 640x480 photographic abominations.

The premise, as Creative have learnt, is simple. You need a half decent camera to take a half decent photograph and the primary factor in this formula is the size of the CCD, in particular the maximum resolution of a photograph, often referred to as megapixels. The 3200Z is a 3.2 megapixel camera with a maximum resolution of 2048x1536 per image. This really should be considered the entry level megapixel value that consumers look for as anything less does not a good photograph make and a five megapixel camera is needed for professional, 35mm like quality.

The 3200Z is a capable digital camera that took quite a good picture but some old problems still exist. Colour representation for example is a touch problematic as large areas of blue sky exhibited a slight graininess which can be exaggerated by zooming. The 3x optical zoom is a nice touch and gives an amateur photographer a chance at some nice close ups. A further 4x digital zoom offers greater shot flexibility.

A reasonable set of menu items offers helpful features such as manual focus and scalable white balance plus the 2 inch rear TFT display can easily be read in the sun. It also supports SD memory sticks and will record video in the MP4 format.

### PCGA Verdict

- The price is definitely right for this 3 megapixel camera
- The CCD occasionally makes a photograph moderately grainy

The DC-3200Z is a fairly capable camera that is ideal for portraits, family photos and with its 3x optical zoom, the odd close up shot too.

84%



### →Detail

**Sensor Type:** Effective 3.2 Megapixels CCD sensor  
**Memory Type:** Integrated 16MB and SD expansion slot  
**Focus:** Auto Focus (Normal: 0.5m to infinity; Macro: 10 - 50 cm)  
**Zoom:** 12X Max. Zoom (3X Optical and 4X Digital Zoom)  
**Flash:** Intelligent IGBT strobe (Auto / Off / On / Red-Eye reduction)  
**Aperture:** f2.66 to 4.92  
**Exposure:** - 2EV to +2EV (in 1/3 steps)  
**White Balance:** Auto / Daylight / Cloudy / Tungsten / Fluorescent / Black & White  
**Shutter Speed:** 1/2000 to 8 sec  
**Screen:** 1.5" TFT LCD  
**Image resolutions:** 2048x1536 (3MP); 1600x1200 (2MP); 1024x768 or 640x480  
**Video capture:** MPEG4 (320 x 240 resolution)  
**Date Stamp:** Yes  
**Battery Type:** 2 x AA  
**Dimension** 92 x 62.2 x 31.5mm  
**Weight** 147g (w/o batteries)  
**Price:** \$349  
**Distributor:** Creative  
**Web:** australia.creative.com  
**Phone:** (02) 9666 6100





## ASUS 52X EXTERNAL CD BURNER

How to teach some old stock new tricks

**D**VD writers are unquestionably the optical format that is receiving the most manufacturing attention these days and thus begs the question "what are companies doing with old CD writer stock?" Well, if you're Asus the answer is simple, stick them in a case and sell them as external drives.

Utilising the USB 2.0 interface there's enough bandwidth (480Mbps) for a 52x speed drive but it's worth knowing that the unit doesn't actually reach its peak speed of 52x until it's completed 80% of the disk. This is because a disk with a hole in the centre has a smaller inner radius than outer radius. Prepare to have your head messed with but the outer edge of a disk is actually spinning at a faster speed than the inner and as such, when the drive head reaches these large surface areas can write its data faster. Ain't physics grand? Now if you really want to get hurt, read up on Quantum physics.

At 155mm (W) x 225mm (D) x 49mm (H) the unit is bulky and does take up some desk space. Furthering the inconvenience is a power cord that plugs into a transformer which plugs into the drive – portability certainly wasn't in mind. Performance wise a read speed of 52x was achieved but when it came to writing, we couldn't break 44x and this was with 52x rated disks. And remember, USB 1.1 has a maximum transfer rate of 6x (12Mbps) which would be somewhat of a waste for this drive so make sure you're USB 2.0 enabled if intending to buy.



### →Detail

**Interface:** USB2.0 (cable included)  
**Access Time:** 100 msec @ 1/3 stroke  
**Write Speed:** 52x  
**Rewrite Speed:** 32x  
**Read Speed:** 52x  
**Buffer Size:** 2MB  
**Format:** CD-DA, CD-ROM, CD-EXTRA, CD-ROM/XA, CD-I, VIDEO-CD, PHOTO-CD, CD-RW  
**Dimensions:** 155mm 225mm x 49mm (W x D x H)  
**Weight:** 1398g (drive only)  
**Price:** \$219  
**Distributor:** Asus  
**Web:** www.asus.com.au  
**Phone:** (02) 9683 3488

### PCGA Verdict

- A fast external CD burning solution
- ✗ Doesn't quite achieve 52x but caps at around 44x and it isn't very portable

Essentially a 52x Asus internal drive that's been placed into external casing that has inputs for USB and power. A little bulky and very heavy at 1.3kg this unit is not very portable and must be aimed at people who are out of bays in their case.

**80%**



## WESTERN DIGITAL 250GB MEDIA CENTRE

Excellent backup tool or hijacker of desk space?

**U**SB has certainly lived up to its expectations because there are more external devices available for PCs now than ever before – and they're getting smarter and better integrated to. Such is the case with Western Digital's latest external hard disk offering which does more than just store files. Primarily this is because there is an 8-in-1 card reader built into the HDD casing allowing for the easy transfer of memory card data to PC.

Potentially handy for digital photographers, the bundled software allows you to configure the drive so that data can be pulled off a memory stick and stored on hard disk. You're still going to need to find a power point as that is the only way this unit can be used – no batteries.

One problem with the card reader though is that the port for memory sticks is way too deep. With a conventional memory stick removing it from the slot takes some dextrous finger work, but a memory stick duo which slots into a memory stick housing was near impossible to remove and eventually involved, \*gasp\*, pliers.

In terms of performance the 480Mbit bandwidth of USB 2.0 is nice but doesn't really compare to SATA and feels quite slow. Basically it takes around 3'43" to transfer 4.2GB of data and around 90 minutes to transfer 70GB.

It's the backup options that make this drive appealing though. With just the press of a button on the front panel, the unit will backup all the relevant data (My Documents, favourites etc.) on your PC. Or it can be configured for a complete backup, OS and all.



### →Detail

**Interface:** USB2.0 (cable included) and IEEE1394 Firewire  
**Capacity:** 250GB  
**Rotational Speed:** 7200 RPM  
**Seek time:** 4.2ms  
**Buffer Size:** 8MB  
**Software:** Dantz Retrospect Express  
**Integrated Battery:** No  
**Card reader:** 8 in 1, Compact Flash I and II, IBM Microdrive, Smart Media, Memory Stick/DUO/PRO, Multimedia card and SD card  
**Weight:** 1960g (drive and power supply)  
**Price:** \$529  
**Distributor:** Achieva  
**Web:** www.westerndigital.com  
**Phone:** (02) 9742 3288

### PCGA Verdict

- Large capacity, ability to read memory cards and comprehensive backup abilities
- ✗ Ultra-deep memory stick becomes fiddly to use, which is uncommon with these sort of devices.

Whether you're looking to add Wi-Fi functionality to a notebook or upgrade 802.11b to 802.11g this card will serve you well

**77%**



**Australia's** *best gadget magazine*

# T3

**EXCLUSIVE**



## Mini is served!

Find out why the iPod mini  
is even better than its big  
brother – only in **T3**!

+

**ZOOM, ZOOM!**

5 digital cameras that get  
you up close and personal

**WIN!**  
A THOMSON  
HOME  
ENTERTAINMENT  
PACK WORTH  
\$3,500!

DVD > MP3 > PDAS > CAMERAS > PHONES > GAMES > CARS

# ON SALE MAY 19





## MSI MEGA 180 MINI PC

Score one point if you spot the oxymoron

No, we're not insulting our good friends at MSI. An oxymoron is simply a statement that contradicts itself, i.e. "a MEGA mini PC". Is it MEGA or mini? Well both actually because MSI marketing refers to this unit as "MSI's Entertainment and Gaming Appliance". Got it? Mega good.

Extremely compact at 200mm (W) x 330mm (D) x 150mm (H) the PC is encased by stylish brushed aluminium that has been expertly dyed black and is guaranteed to fit in with other Hi-Fi equipment. Furthering ease of use in a home theatre environment the front panel features a prominent volume knob along with a set of CD controls. Other niceties include a 6-in-1 card reader that's perfect for viewing digital photos, literally as they're taken and a bottom panel that when opened reveals a plethora of I/O from SPDIF to IEEE1394 (Firewire). A bonus inclusion is the 802.11b (11Mbps) wireless networking which would allow this machine to stream audio or video wirelessly from a main server making this a viable alternative to WiFi MP3 players.

Most impressive though is the front LED panel which when lit mimics an integrated stereo system perfectly. It displays the time, pre programmed-channel, radio frequency, hard disk activity and volume among lots of other information.

This is however a barebones system which means that it ships with a motherboard and 200W power supply only. You need to add your own CPU (AMD Socket 462), hard disk, memory and optical device. The front panel and remote control is fully wired in which makes this a great way for novice techies to get their feet wet assembling their own PC and really it's a far simpler job than putting together Ikea furniture.

### PCGA Verdict

- This barebones PC has it all and matches expensive Hi-Fi equipment well
- ⚡ Not really enough room or ventilation for a high end video card

**This barebones system is ideal for a home theatre setup, especially in a Wi-Fi enabled household as it makes for an affordable way of streaming anything you want to somplace other than the computer room.**

**90%**



### →Detail

**CPU:** Socket 462 for AMD Duron and Athlon XP processors up to 3000+

**Video:** nVIDIA nForce2 (Crush 18G) + MCP2T Chipset

**RAM:** Support for up to 2 DIMMs, 2.0GB DDR 333 memory

**Expansion:** 1 x 8X AGP Slot, Supports 1 x PCI 32 bit Slot

**Audio:** Instant-ON CD / MP3 and Radio Features, Support for 5.1ch Surround Sound Audio, nVIDIA SoundStorm™ Dolby® Digital (Needs Dolby Receiver), Dual Optical SPDIF In / Out

**Video:** Integrated nForce2 (8X AGP), Dual VGA out, S-Video Out

**Communication:** Wireless LAN 802.11b, 10/100Mbps LAN, 56K Modem

**Front Panel:** Optical SPDIF in, Mic-In, Headphone Jack, USB 2.0 x2, IEEE 1394 Firewire x 2, (6 pin and 4 pin), 6 in 1 Media Card Reader

**USB:** 2.0 x 4

**Price:** \$550

**Distributor:** MSI

**Web:**

www.msicomputer.com.au

**Phone:** (02) 9748 0070



## AOPEN XC CUBE AV

Further commitment to the Hi-Fi PC

A open's latest barebones PC, the AV is clearly designed, like the MSI offering, to look good in a Home Theatre/Hi-Fi setup. The aluminium casing and front has is nicely powder coated black but lacks the glossy finish of the Mega 180.

Inside there's a pre-installed Aopen motherboard that's compatible with socket 478 Intel 4/Celeron processors and utilising the i865 chipset can support a maximum FSB of 800MHz. Although no processor is included, a vertically standing heat sink fan designed to fit in the case is included and comes mounted over the empty socket. Don't get fooled and think there's a CPU there. Also preinstalled is a 220W power supply and an 6-in-1 card reader which digital camera enthusiasts will like as the images from the camera's memory device can be viewed instantly on the big screen.

The most appealing feature of this barebones system though is the Instant On function. Once you've added the required components to the system (CPU, memory, HDD, optical device) included software allows the system to carry out DVD/TV viewing, MP3/CD playback and FM radio functions from the press of a button on the remote or front panel of the PC without having to look at Windows or a desktop.

Another impressive feature is the Vacuum Fluorescent LED display, which displays relevant information such as sound format and the function that the PC is currently performing. The bundled software is also very good, particularly the inclusion of video recording software that allows this system to double as a digital recorder. It is however let down by a lack of Wi-Fi abilities which is a major omission for a Home Theatre PC.

### PCGA Verdict

- Excellent bundled software including digital recording and "Instant on"
- ⚡ Someone forgot WiFi, S-Video out and Dual VGA

**A nice bright LED display in a compact design makes this a competent Home Theatre product. WiFi needs to be added (PCI card recommended) in order for this system to reach its full potential.**

**78%**



### →Detail

**Dimensions:** 300mm (W) x 200mm (D) x 185mm (H)

**CPU:** Socket 478 for INTEL Pentium 4/Celeron

**FSB:** 400/533/800

**Video:** AGP 4X/8x, integrated i865G

**RAM:** Support for 2 DIMMs, 266/333/400 Dual Channel DDR DIMM up to 2GB

**Expansion:** 1 x 8X AGP Slot, 2 x PCI 32 bit Slot

**Audio:** Instant-ON TV / DVD / CD / MP3 and Radio Features, support for 5.1ch, Optical SPDIF Out, Optical SPDIF in on front panel

**Video:** Integrated i865g, 1 x VGA out, Composite Out

**Communication:** 10/100/1000Mbps LAN

**Front Panel:** Optical SPDIF in, Mic-In, Headphone Jack, USB 2.0 x2, IEEE 1394 Firewire x 2, (6 pin and 4 pin), 6 in 1 Media Card Reader

**USB:** 2.0 x 4

**Price:** \$799

**Distributor:** Bluechip IT

**Web:**

www.bluechipit.com.au

**Phone:** (02) 8745 8400



# PLAYED ANYTHING GOOD ON XBOX LATELY?

**PLAYABLE DEMOS!**  
CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II  
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## SQUEEZEBOX WI-FI MP3 PLAYER

Hear that whooshing sound? It's the winds of change

**A**s was alluded to in this month's tech intro, the scope of Wi-Fi is far greater than simple networking and it's exciting to see consumer devices being built on the technology. Thus is the case of the Squeezebox which is a really impressive device.

Setup simply involved plugging the squeezebox into a Hi-Fi and then turning it on. Once started you then had to answer whether the device receives its data via wired Ethernet or 802.11b Wi-Fi and you're done. In the case of a Wi-Fi connection the squeezebox automatically identified the Hotspot, connected to it and used DHCP to get an IP address. The next part of the installation is to install software on the PC hosting the music files and you're done. At this stage you can sit back with the Squeezebox and use its remote to navigate folders, play-lists and individual MP3 files.

Utilising 802.11g (11Mbps), performance was absolutely astounding with no distortion and skip free streaming of MP3s over a distance of 20 metres. In fact despite connecting a laptop into the 802.11b stream and navigating web pages the Squeezebox maintained the highest quality playback without missing a beat.

Further scope for this device however is the real bargain because the developers have allowed for server plugins to be made by the community and are freely distributed. There are already 100's of plugins available including a game of blackjack you can play on the Squeezebox's LED screen. The best plugin however ships with the software and streams Shoutcast/Internet Radio to the Squeezebox opening up hundreds of channels of quality audio.

### PCGA Verdict

- A fantastic way to use your PC as a music/Internet radio server on your Home theatre setup
- The shoutcast plugin can occasionally cause the server to crash

Simple to install the Squeezebox connects to a Wi-Fi network in seconds and streams digital music perfectly. The ability to listen to shoutcast streams and programmable plugins rock.

**95%**



### →Detail

**Dimensions:** 216mm (W) x 48mm (H) x 117mm (D)

**Hardware:** 120MHz network processor with 2MB buffer

**Display:** 40 x 2 vacuum fluorescent display

**Firmware:** Flash upgradeable

**Audio Formats:** AIFF, WAV, MP3, MP2, AAC, FLAC, Ogg Vorbis

**Wi-Fi:** 802.11g (54Mbps)

**Audio outputs:** Headphones, Stereo RCA, Digital Optical, Digital coax

**Input:** 10/100/1000 Ethernet

**Price:** \$495

**Distributor:** PC Case Gear

**Web:** [www.pccasegear.com.au](http://www.pccasegear.com.au)

**Phone:** (03) 9584 7266



## BELKIN USB 2.0 HUBS

USB, you gotta have somewhere to plug it in

**U**SB hubs remain a decent source of revenue for numerous technology companies and we are constantly seeing interesting revisions. For Belkin however, all their efforts in design and modularity have been pretty much ignored by the public whose desks were under siege. Smaller devices meant more room on desk – that's what makes users happy.

Thus the new line of Belkin hubs are considerably smaller but along the lines of previous hubs, they remain modular. These hubs can all be connected to each other to share mains power and to use up less of that precious desktop space. Available in two sizes, the larger seven port hub features five USB inputs on the back and two on the top for easy insertion and removal, say for flash drives or MP3 players. The seven port hub does however require mains power.

The smaller 5 port mini USB hub on the other hand which ships with a power supply doesn't immediately require power. Able to draw current from your PC, this smaller hub can handle two high speed devices without requiring power input. Connect three high speed devices though and it's time to plug the transformer in.

All the hubs support USB 2.0 allowing for a data rate of 480Mbps and feature front side LEDs that blink when the associated port streams data. With a decently small footprint Belkin's new range of hubs are a lot more desk friendly.



### →Detail

**Ports:** 7 and 4

**Interface:** USB 2.0

**Power supply:** included

**Price:**

7 port hub: \$85

4 port hub: \$55

Distributor: Harris Technology

**Web:**

[www.harristechnology.com.au](http://www.harristechnology.com.au)

**Phone:** 1 300 139 999

### PCGA Verdict

- Expands the number of USB ports on a PC/Notebook
- 7 port hub requires the use of a bulky power supply

Belkin have caught on to the market's desire for smaller, less desk offensive products and have miniaturised their range of USB 2.0 hubs to a more unobtrusive size. Both hubs are modular and expanding the ports is as simple as stacking them on top of each other.

**88%**





## STEELPAD 4S

For gaming excellence, just add steel

**A**nother in the line of "professional" gaming mouse mats the Steelpad actually has what it takes to improve your game. But as is often the case, there's got to be a catch. In the case of the Steelpad, it had a problem with Logitech optical mice, except, according to the manufacturer, the MX series. However, utilising an MX700 here in the labs an awkward problem manifested where the mouse would stop dead and only by pressing a mouse button would it wake up.

This was somewhat disconcerting because the Steelpad was showing some real promise. Testing it with a range of online first person shooters it became quickly apparent that it offered a lot of control and precision without the drawback of slowing the mouse down. In fact there was just enough resistance that the mouse glided over the surface with near perfect resistance offering a balance between speed and movement but with just enough friction to allow for precision when sniping or lining up a shot. There's also plenty of surface area which virtually eliminates any problems with mice over-shooting the mat and for even greater control some adhesive Teflon coating is included to stick on mouse feet which improves slickness and is especially useful on mice with inferior or scratched tootsies.

If you're not convinced that this mat is the one for you and you've got the DVD edition of the mag, note what the Swedish CS team use in the Intel Extreme Edition Challenge 2 video. If it's good enough for the world's best, it's going to be hard that it's not good enough for you. Right?



### →Detail

**Dimension:** 290mm (W) x 245 mm (D)  
**Price:** \$79  
**Distributor:** PC Casegear  
**Web:** www.pccasegear.com.au  
**Phone:** (03) 9584 7266



## ZIPPY METAL KEYBOARD WK-720

Slim, light and metallic

**A**fter learning of the evils of bad ergonomics in the nineties it's surprising that in the 21st century keyboards are being marketed for their aesthetic appeal rather than ergo-prowess. Such is the case with this Zippy keyboard which would look great with a brushed aluminium system, but as a functioning keyboard is not conducive to fast, effective typing.

The reason that this keyboard isn't ideal is that it's modelled after a Notebook keyboard. The keys are only millimetres tall and are too close together causing regular typos and they also lack the kind of "clicky" tactile feedback that keyboards with full sized keys offer.

On the more positive side though this keyboard is extremely thin at only 410mm (W) x 170mm (D) and the aluminium finish is quite nice. Another attractive feature is that the Num/CAPS/Scroll lock lights utilise an ultra bright LED. Stunning at night you just have to be careful not to let it shine into your eyes, it's that bright.

Amusingly the most other remarkable thing about this keyboard is that it's so bare. There aren't any web/mail/multimedia navigational buttons or a function key so that the F-keys can be used in place of this function. This is a simple, small and light keyboard designed more for aesthetic appeal over ergonomics.

Minimalism is good and all, especially if you're a German architect. Pressuming you're a gamer who is wanting a keyboard that helps you rack up the frags, this probably isn't the droid... Err... Keyboard that you're looking for.



### →Detail

**Dimensions:** 410mm (W) x 170mm (D)  
**Keyboard layout:** 101 key US  
**Multimedia keys:** None  
**Price:** \$65  
**Distributor:** Anyware  
**Web:** www.anyware.com.au  
**Phone:** (02) 9879 5788

### PCGA Verdict

- An excellent mouse mat that offers exceptional balance between speed and precision
- Doesn't work with Logitech optical mice and has difficulties with the Logitech MX series

**This is a fantastic mouse pad that is only let down by the fact that the Logitech MX700, the preferred mouse of many excellent gamers doesn't work on it. For any other mouse though, optical or ball, this mat will definitely improve your game.**

**83%**

### PCGA Verdict

- Attractive with a PC encased in brushed aluminium
- Keys are to notebook like and it lacks multimedia keys

**An attractive keyboard designed for a market that values a small footprint over larger more ergonomic keyboards.**

**65%**



## MODDIN' ART

Where common sense gives way to the authority of aesthetics

**Price:** \$59

**Distributor:** PC Case Gear

**Phone:** (03) 9584 7266

**PCGA Installation**

**Rating:** Average – Need to be able to remove and install an AMD heat sink, connect it to power and attach the throttle to a spare PCI bay

**PCGA Verdict:** An elegant, attractive way to cool down your CPU and light up your PC. This HSF ranks very highly in regard to "cool factor", yuk yuk.

### COOLERMMASTER JET 7+

**I**t's a mod, a heat sink fan and a highly effective means of overclocking your system. The CoolerMaster Jet 7+ is compatible with Socket A/370/462 CPUs so there's plenty of scope for installation. Literally a Jet engine on a copper heat sink what makes the Jet 7+ so impressive is that unlike a conventional fan which blows directly onto the copper sink, the Jet 7+ uses air pressure.

As the CPU heats up and in turn heats up the copper sink the air around it becomes warm. Meanwhile the jet engine on top isn't blowing directly onto the HSF but is creating massive amounts of air pressure. Warm air is less dense than cold air and air always wants to move from high to low pressure. By funnelling all the hot air away the Jet 7+ cools the CPU and its exhaust helps to cool the overall case temperature.

A provided throttle which installs into a PCI slot allows you to control the rotation of the turbine. 1900 RPM is amazingly quiet and will keep a 2500+ processor cool at 40 degrees. Turn it up to 3500 RPM though and it sounds like a mini jet engine. On the other hand the "leet factor" of slowly cranking the throttle up for your friends is pretty high.

As a mod, inside the turbine both front and back are LEDs (red or blue) that light the rim of the intake and exhaust. Shining beautifully off the polished metal housing this is an attractive HSF. It is large though at 122mm tall. But for overclocking the results are good and reports are in that users have been able to lower their CPU temp by up to 15 degrees, at load.



**Price:** \$12.50

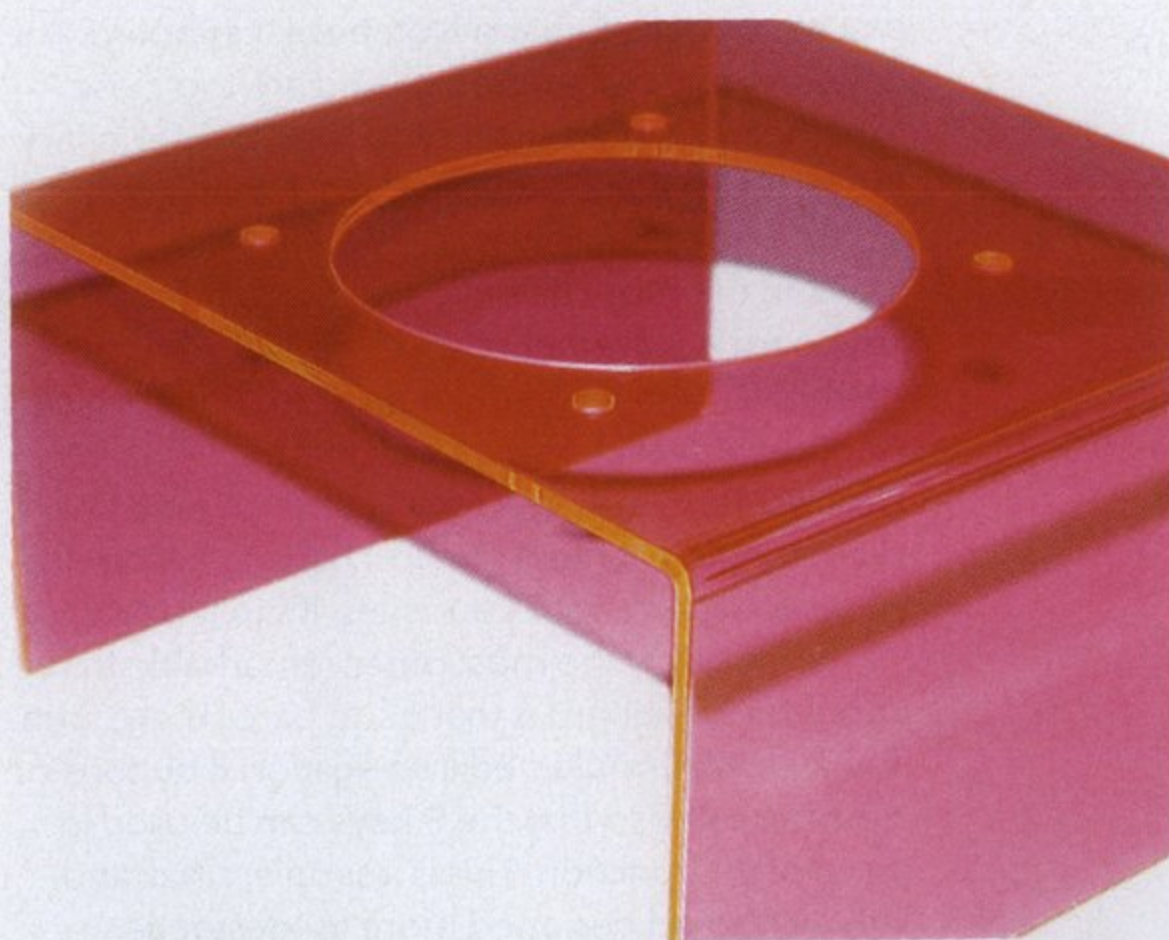
**Distributor:** PC Case Gear

**Phone:** (03) 9584 7266

**PCGA Installation**

**Rating:** Average – CAUTION. Power supplies are a high voltage item so NEVER work on a power supply that's plugged in. Otherwise no more difficult than a few screws.

**PCGA Verdict:** A great way to turn a typically boring power supply into something a little more interesting.



### RED UV PSU MOD

**U**ltraviolet continues to be an extremely effective way of "lighting" up a PC because of how intensely it glows when irradiated by a UV lamp and now your PSU can get the bright and shiny treatment. The housing is for the older styled PSU but does have mounts for an 80mm top fan, but isn't compatible with newer, 120mm equipped power supplies.

Installation is simple but requires caution. As should always be the case when working on a power supply, make sure that it's unplugged and left to rest, preferably over night, because you're going to have to remove the aluminium housing. There are some capacitors in there that can maintain a charge for quite a while and give a shock if you're unlucky. Once implemented you end up with a spiffy see through power supply that glows under UV.

**Price:** \$19.50

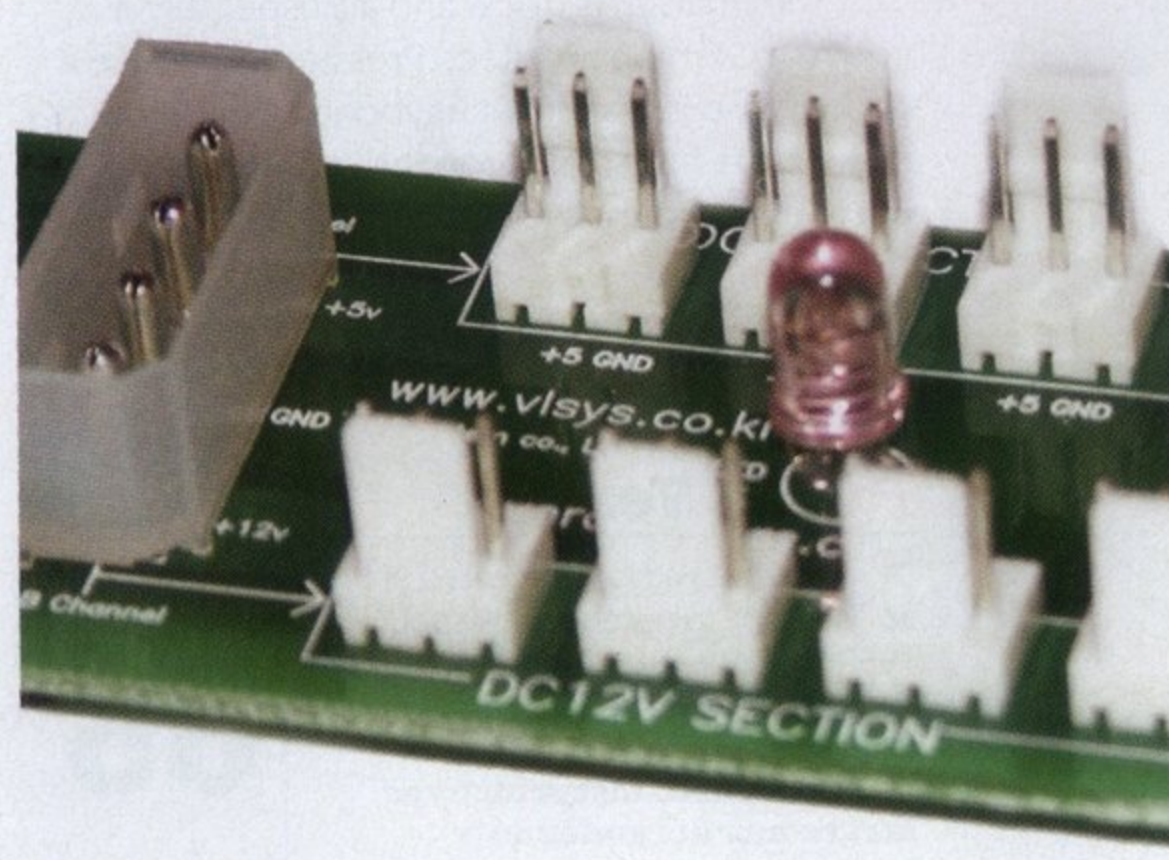
**Distributor:** PC Case Gear

**Phone:** (03) 9584 7266

**PCGA Installation**

**Rating:** Easy – You simply mount it over two PCI slots and then plug one 5.25" Molex power connector to it.

**PCGA Verdict:** A great way to power a huge number of devices just because of how small it is, especially when compared to other fan controller solutions.



### MULTI POWER PORT PLUS

**P**op quiz. What's one of the first things you quickly run out of when you're into modding? The answer, power sockets of course. Thankfully there's an answer in a little product called the Multi Power Port Plus. The port mounts at the back of the case but requires two PCI slots which could have been alleviated by mounting it onto a PCI blank plate.

Once installed though it's just a matter of plugging on 5.25" Molex plug into it and you're ready to power 8 additional case fans and six LED case lights. A highly compact and effective way to power numerous fans and lights. Of course we can't be held responsible if you now go and stick so much lighting to your PC that you start brightening that pitch black gaming room of yours.



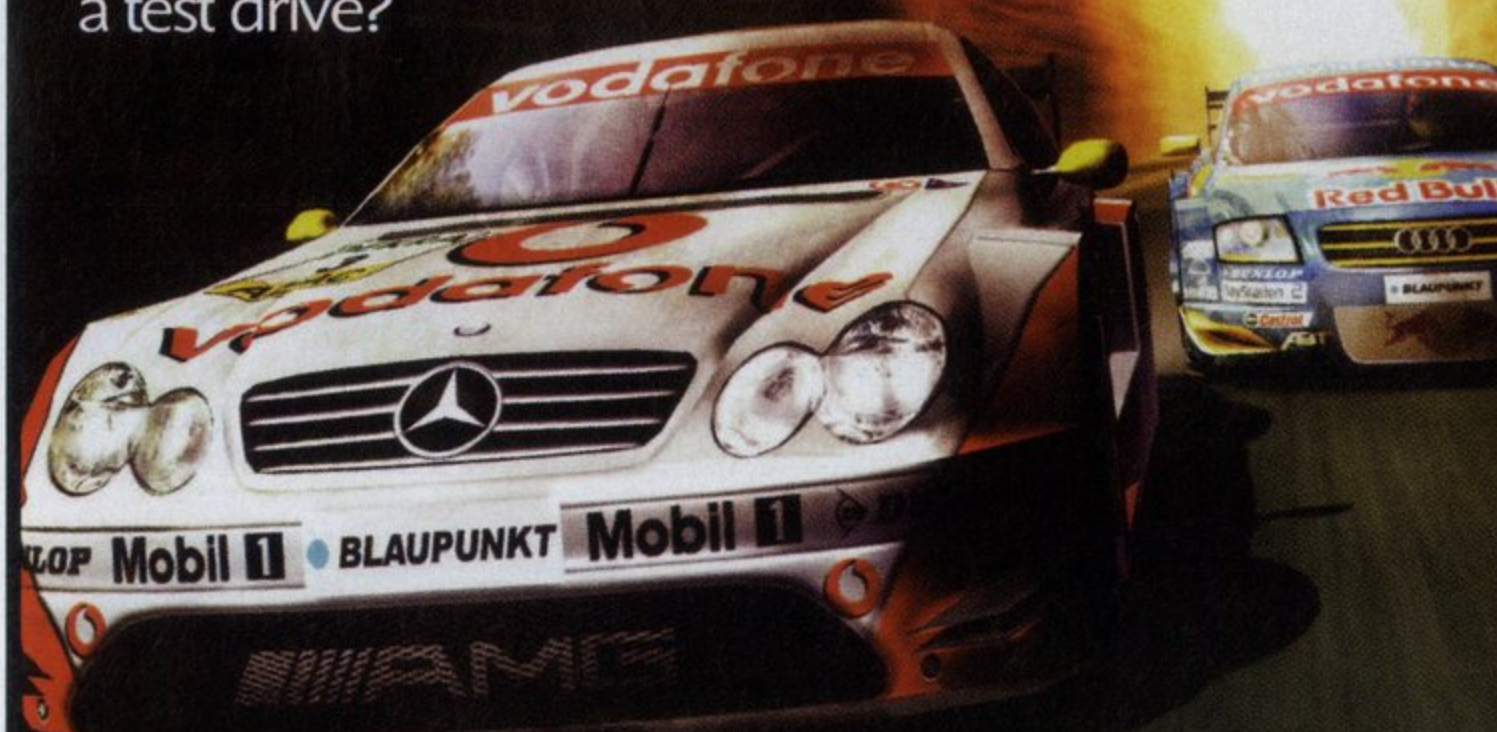
# PC GAMES **addict**

YOUR GUIDE TO THE HOT PC GAMES ADDICT **JUNE** DISCS

## V8 SUPERCARS 2

Why not take both the single and multi-player demos of our game of the month for a test drive?

**PLAYABLE!**



## ON THE **CDS**

### ON CD 1: **PLAYABLE DEMOS**

Perimeter  
Splinter Cell:  
Pandora Tomorrow  
(multi)  
V8 Supercars 2

### **MOVIES**

Half-Life 2 - Strider  
Half-Life 2 - Coastline  
Metal Gear Solid 3 -  
Camouflage

### **PATCHES**

Spellforce v1.11

### ON CD 2: **PLAYABLE DEMOS**

Soldner: Secret Wars  
Warlords Battlecry III

### **MOVIES**

Men of Valor -  
gameplay  
Everquest II - Full trailer

### **DRIVERS**

ATI Radeon Catalyst  
nVidia Forceview  
update

## SOLDNER: SECRET WARS

Two maps, three modes, hours of militant mayhem.

**PLAYABLE!**



## PERIMETER

Looks like Final Fantasy, plays like an RTS classic.

**PLAYABLE!**



## ON THE **DVD**

### **PLAYABLE DEMOS**

Apache Air Assault  
Colin McRae Rally 04  
(multi)  
Dark Horizons: LORE  
Dead Man's Hand  
Joint Operations:  
Typhoon Rising  
Manhattan Chase  
Micro Flight  
Painkiller - Demo #2  
Perimeter  
Shanghai Street Racer  
Soldner: Secret Wars  
Splinter Cell:  
Pandora Tomorrow  
Tough Trucks: Modified  
Monsters  
V8 Supercars 2  
Warlords Battlecry III

### **MOVIES**

Everquest II - Trailer  
Everquest II - Character  
creation  
Half-Life 2 - Strider  
Half-Life 2 - Coastline  
Intel Extreme Edition 2  
Men of Valor (2)

Metal Gear Solid 3 -  
camouflage demo  
Serious Sam 2  
STALKER: Shadows of  
Chernobyl

### **PATCHES**

Breed - retail patch  
Call of Duty 1.03  
Call of Duty 1.03 - Linux  
Dedicated server  
Civilization III: Conquests  
v1.22 Far Cry 1.1  
Massive Assault: Full  
Network Client  
Ragnarok Juno Pack  
Update  
Sacred - retail patch  
Spellforce v1.11  
Splinter Cell: Pandora  
Tomorrow MP 1.1  
update  
XIII 1.01

### **DRIVERS**

ATI Radeon Catalyst  
nVidia Forceview  
update



# V8 Supercars 2

**Developer:** Codemasters

**Publisher:** Codemasters

**Size:** 117MB / 118MB

**Min Requirements:** 750MHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

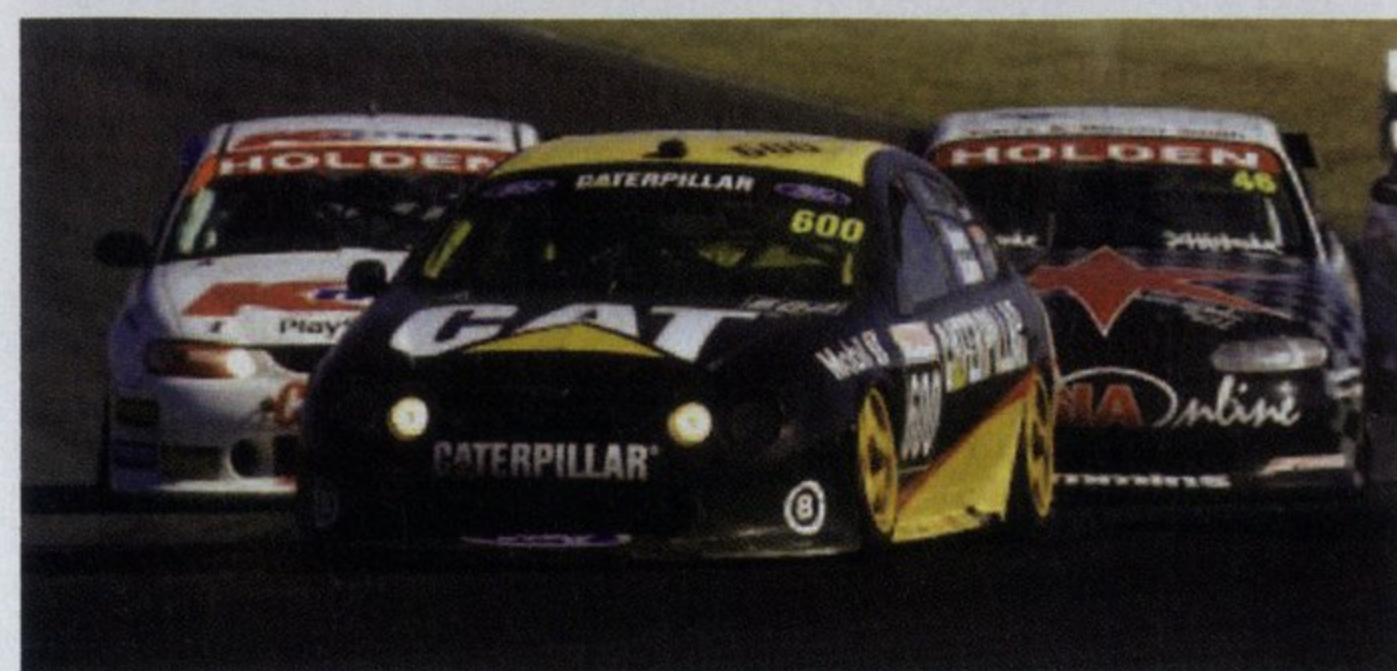
We here at PCGA deem the title of this racing game to be deceptive, as this is not a game focused on the V8 Supercars series at all. That's because the series is one of fifteen covered in this extremely comprehensive racing simulation.

Here you'll get to sample three of the racing series, the classics (in an old E-Type Jaguar), as well as a DTM and of course an Australian V8 Supercar race.

Bad news for the Ford fans, you'll have to drive a Commodore. Buy the game is that really hurts.

We've also included the multiplayer demo, which should help everyone get an idea of how smooth a ride they'll get online. At time of publication Bigpond's GameArena was hosting a multiplayer competition, so their servers and forums should be a good place to find willing opponents to race (or chase in the event you're not so great in a V8).

Note, all references to "Race Driver 2" in the demos are due to the varying name of the game overseas - so relax this is still the same game.



# PERIMETER

**Developer:** K-D Lab

**Publisher:** Codemasters

**Size:** 179MB

**Min Requirements:** 1GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Malevolent monsters in a sci-fi setting that would be certain to wipe out the good guys if it weren't

for their funky glowing force-fields that protect their dwellings... Sounds like a run-down of the *Final Fantasy* storyline, but it's actually the premise behind Perimeter a new Russian developed RTS game.

Tactics appear to revolve around clever use of terraforming, energy management and choosing the right units to create by

morphing lesser ones into more powerful/capable ones.

Very pretty, and comes with a tutorial to help the player get a grasp of things like unit morphing and use of the perimeter shield. A must see title for RTS-heads.



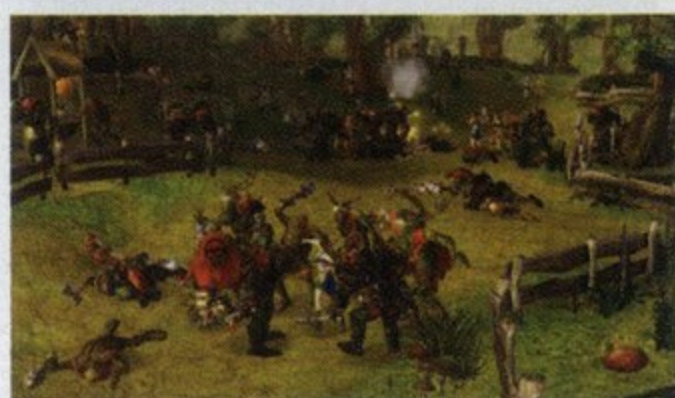
## ESSENTIAL PATCHES

**SPELLFORCE: OotD v1.11**

This patch brings a few convenience orientated improvements to the game. hero runs can be exchanged directly, soulstones are names according to their position, plus nifty tool-tips.

**VIDEO DRIVERS: nVidia & ATI**

In case you haven't noticed we've taken to including the latest Catalyst and Forceware drivers on the 2nd CD (and the DVD of course) every issue. This is to help ensure that you won't have far to go to fix any video problems you may have with the latest demos on our discs.



## Men of Valor movie

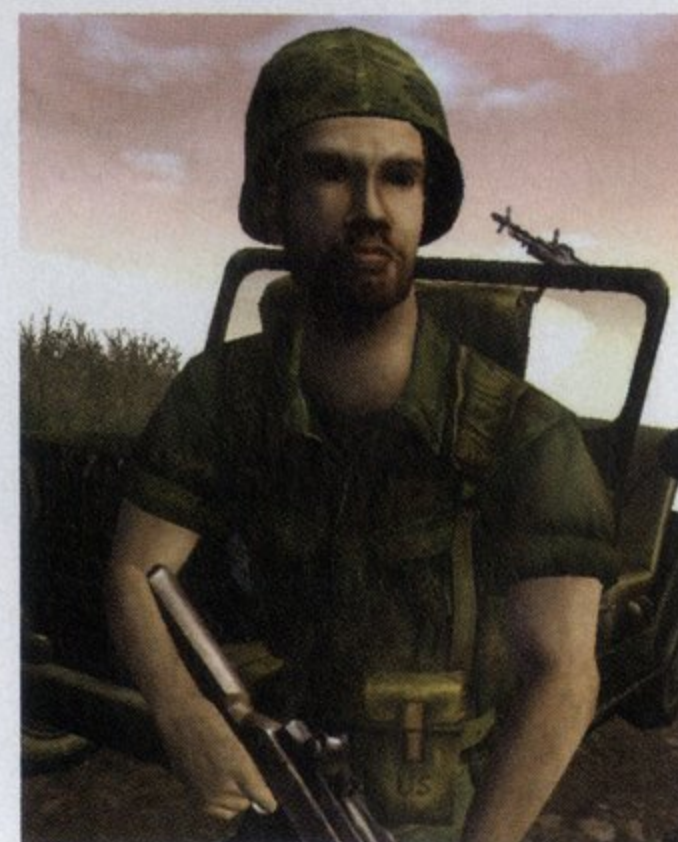
**Developer:** 2015

**Publisher:** Sierra/Vivendi

**Size:** 12MB

A brief glimpse of some gameplay footage of Vivendi's upcoming FPS, *Men of Valor* (we suspect they might spell it correctly here).

Although the footage of this ambush scene is a little blurry it gives a good idea as to the style of play. Looks like there'll be a fair bit of shooting innocent villagers. Erk!





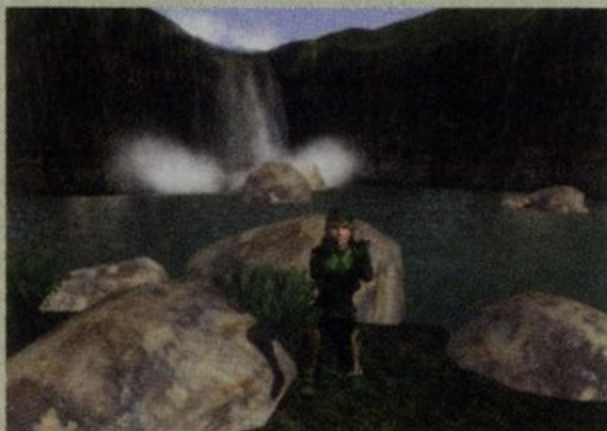
## EVERQUEST II Full Trailer

Developer: Sony Online Entertainment  
Publisher: Ubisoft  
Size: 70MB

What was a small teaser trailer on last issue's disc has now grown into a more substantial look at the next *Everquest* title.

If this footage is anything to go by, we suspect newbies will be clearing out forests of evil deer... That is if they can bring themselves to killing the sickeningly cute Bambi clones. Think of all the venison you could make! Looks gorgeous at any rate.

We also suspect those ultra-cheesy voice overs you can hear throughout the trailer are a sign that we'll be hearing things from monsters and NPCs this time around. Whether or not this will extend to allowing for 32 or 64 channels of sound, which will of course be an issue when people are getting together to take down high level mobs together. Could be a truly hilarious geeky cacophony...



## Warlords Battlecry III

Developer: Infinite Publisher: QV Software Size: 266MB  
Min Requirements: 450MHz CPU, 128MB RAM, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

After a couple of successful releases, the locally developed *Warlords Battlecry* RTS series (not to be confused with the turn-based *Warlords* series) is all set to unleash its third instalment.

Having received healthy praise from critics and gamers alike, the basic formula has changed little, with the "all the stuff you liked before, but more of it" theory applied in full force.

Most notably for fans are the introduction of five new races, a new hero development system that

comes with eight new classes, a whole mess of new spells & magic items, new terrain types, new dragons, new buildings and probably a new kitchen sink too if you look hard enough.

For those of you who never played the earlier games, there was no shortage of all the above before anyway, so it's a case of a deep game that just got deeper. If you're after a little more insight into *Warlords Battlecry III*, go check out this issue's preview on page 50.

## SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Developer: Ubisoft  
Publisher: Ubisoft  
Size: 60.7MB  
Min Requirements: 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Yeah, the screenshot's dark to the point where you can barely see a thing, but what do you expect in a stealth sim?

Last issue we gave you the single-player demo, but this time around you're getting a taste of *Pandora Tomorrow's* multi-player aspects.

It's a two-on-two scenario here, spies vs. guards with both sides having their strengths and weaknesses, playing quite differently to one another. Obviously, the spies play more like Sam, while the guards are stronger in open combat.

It may seem quite limited only having four players, but consider this - a stealth game with large team sizes makes as much sense as a sunroof on a submarine.



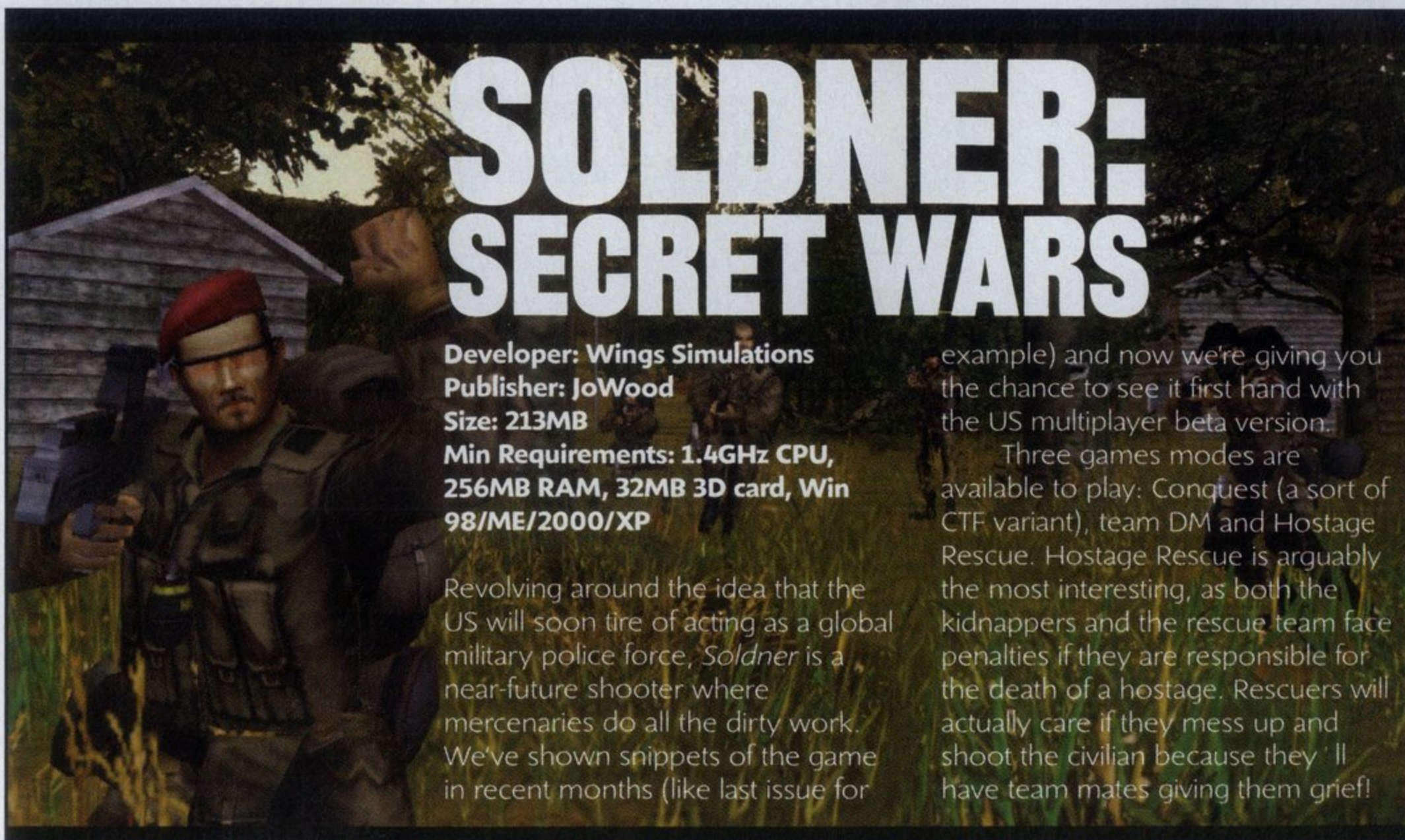
## SOLDNER: SECRET WARS

Developer: Wings Simulations  
Publisher: JoWood  
Size: 213MB  
Min Requirements: 1.4GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, Win 98/ME/2000/XP

Revolving around the idea that the US will soon tire of acting as a global military police force, *Soldner* is a near-future shooter where mercenaries do all the dirty work. We've shown snippets of the game in recent months (like last issue for

example) and now we're giving you the chance to see it first hand with the US multiplayer beta version.

Three games modes are available to play: Conquest (a sort of CTF variant), team DM and Hostage Rescue. Hostage Rescue is arguably the most interesting, as both the kidnappers and the rescue team face penalties if they are responsible for the death of a hostage. Rescuers will actually care if they mess up and shoot the civilian because they'll have team mates giving them grief!





NEXT MONTH

**EXCLUSIVE!**

# STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC 2

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STORY, THE SITH AND THE SABERS!

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ESSENTIAL  
DEMOS**  
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FULL SAVAGE CLIENT  
UEFA 2004  
MORE!

**EXCLUSIVE**

**THIEF**

**DEADLY SHADOWS**

Arch-burglar Garrett returns to  
steal from the rich and lurk in  
the dark. Sneaky preview!



**REVIEWED** HITMAN: CONTRACTS, TRUE CRIME,  
BREED, BEYOND DIVINITY, SUDDEN STRIKE 3,  
PERIMETER, UEFA 2004 AND MORE...

**PREVIEWED** ROME: TOTAL WAR, BATTLE FOR  
MIDDLE-EARTH, THE SIMS 2, THE NEW NEED FOR  
SPEED PLUS AMAZING NEW SHOTS OF HALF-LIFE 2!

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All magazine contents and gifts subject to change. Some gifts not available overseas.

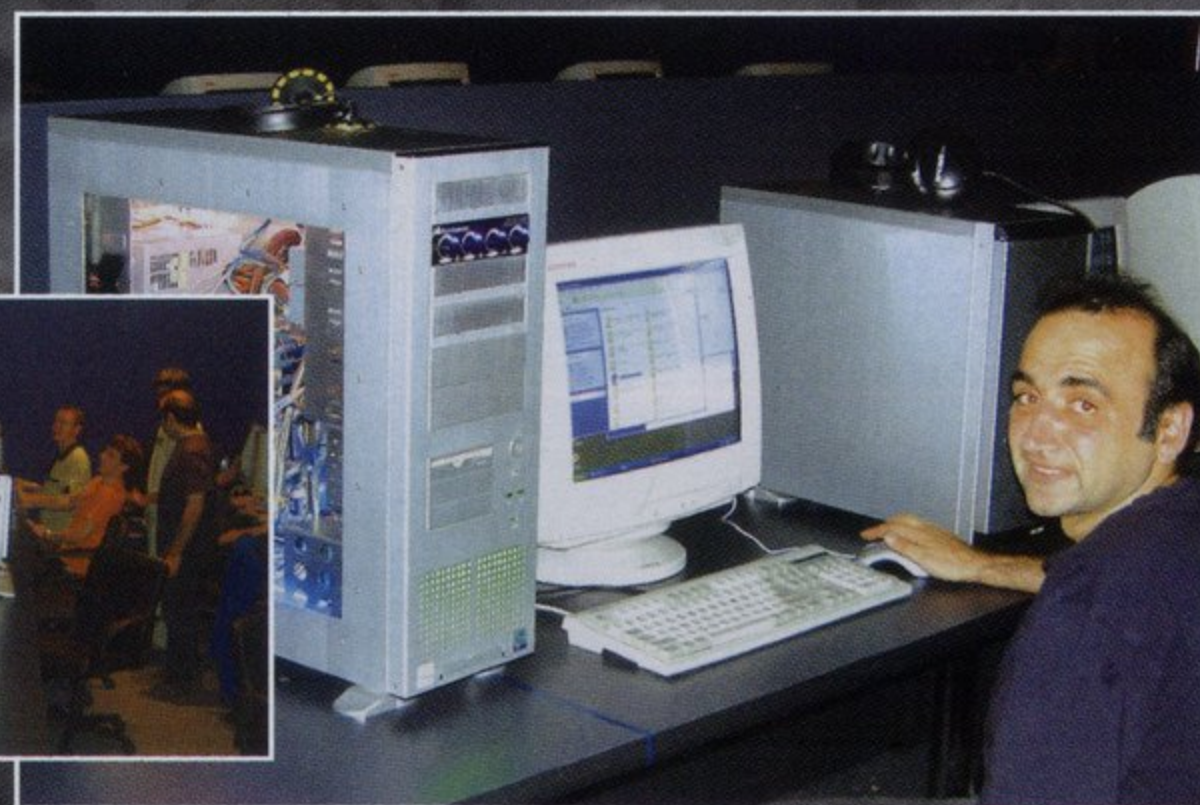
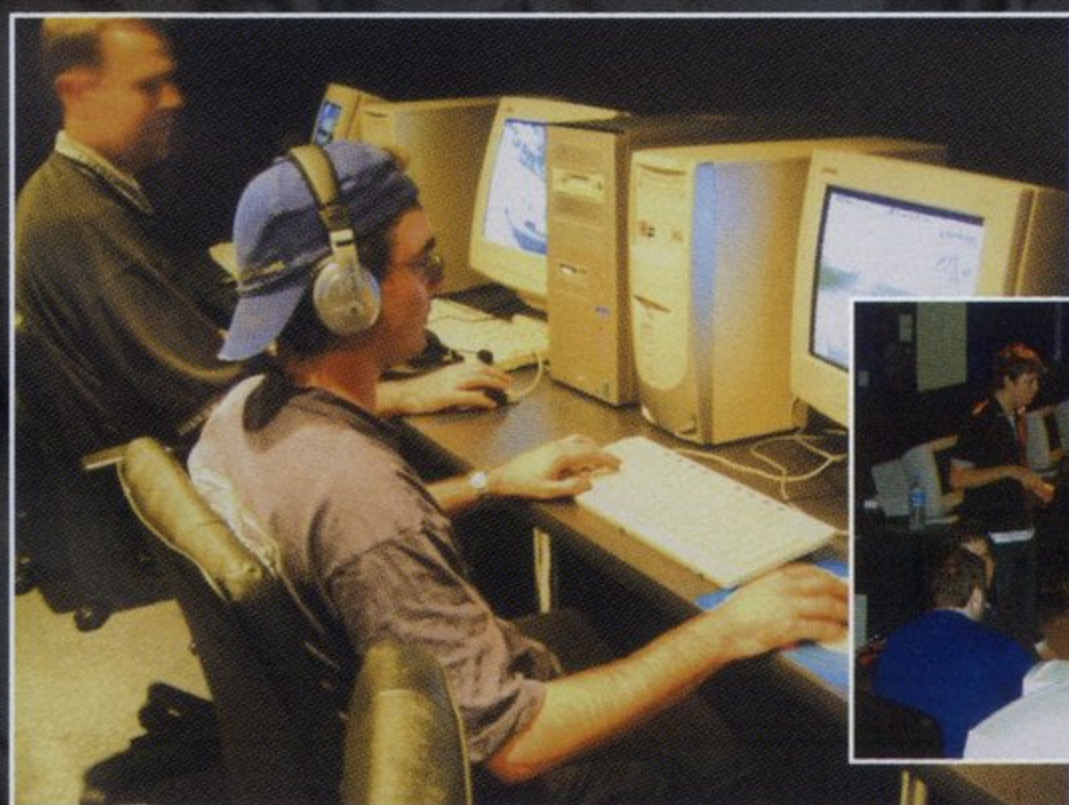




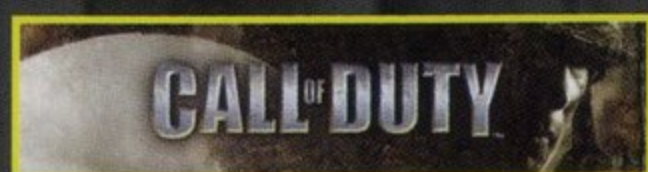
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